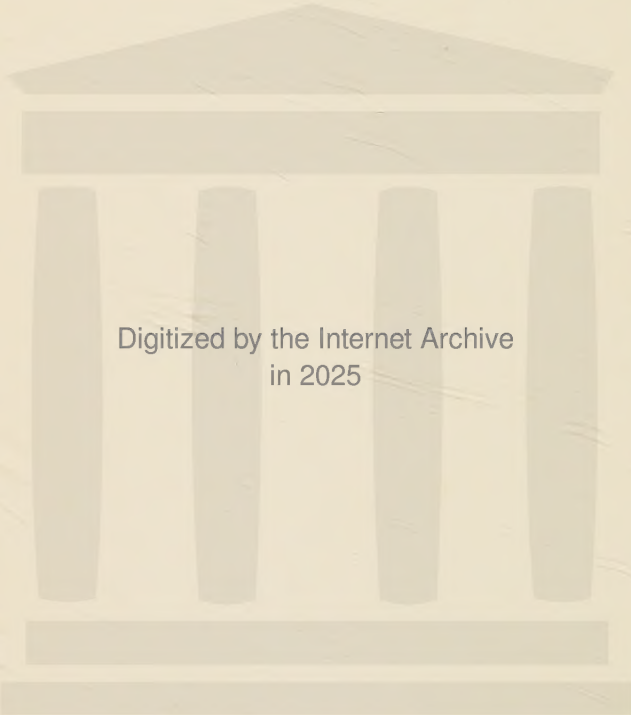


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off the California coast



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OF
BLIX

THE
MORAN OF
THE LADY LETTY

A STORY OF LOVE AND DEATH
IN THE SOUTH SEAS

BLIX

BY
FRANK MORRIS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY HENRIETTA MORRIS AND
HAROLD MORRIS

VOLUME I

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(I)
B L I X

(II)
**MORAN OF
THE LADY LETTY**

**A STORY OF ADVENTURE OFF
THE CALIFORNIA COAST**

**BY
FRANK NORRIS**

**WITH INTRODUCTIONS
BY KATHLEEN NORRIS AND
RUPERT HUGHES**

VOLUME III

KENNIKAT PRESS, INC./PORT WASHINGTON, N. Y.

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INTRODUCTION

DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

BLIX, more than any other of his books, is the story of Frank Norris himself—or rather the story of his early youth. He made the word himself, coined it, to express the joy and freedom and friendship of youth, and these are exactly the qualities he captured in the little book, and that it holds as fresh and sweet to-day as twenty-five years ago.

To those of us who were destined so long to outlive him, and to whom his fine and free and gallant spirit has become a sort of splendid tradition, Frank never did outgrow his youth. Before it had ended, when he was boyishly planning a sailing trip around the world, when he was boyishly triumphant that the sale of the *Pit*, to the *Saturday Evening Post*, made it possible for him to carelessly write a check for five hundred dollars—and he wrote it with an excited flourish that makes the little old check pathetic and glorious to-day to us who preserve it!—kind fortune stilled the eager voice and closed the searching, untired eyes forever. It was not for Frank to grow old, to become disillusioned and wearied and sated with the life he found so sweet!

Yet there are two distinct types to his work; there are matured and strangely wise passages in *The Octopus* and *The Pit*. There is no such passage in all the gay, shining, laughing pages of *Blix*. The boy who wrote *McTeague* was in one sense a man, if in no more. He had not much to learn about his art.

But the boy who wrote *Blix* was like all of us at twenty; he believed in fairies, the fairies that lurk along

water-fronts, and behind practical jokes, and that dearest fairy of all—the fairy of platonic friendship.

The dream of sending a manuscript to an Eastern publisher, and receiving the little slip of acceptance in reply—which of us did not know it? Frank knew it, and in *Blix* he gives Condyl his own fears and doubts and joys over a first story. He gives Blix herself the qualities he found in his first love—and his last!—in the woman to whom that little first promise of literary success was as important as it was to Frank, and who was to share the brief years that remained to him, as his wife.

Through the simplicity of these pages runs his sure touch, his unmistakable genius. Just how visible it is I had myself forgotten until to-day I read *Blix* again. There is a breadth and a vision about this little tale of young love that makes it worthy of our best American tradition—which is to say, after all, that makes it worthy of the man who wrote it.

KATHLEEN NORRIS.

INTRODUCTION

LIKE the Athenians, the San Franciscans regard their city with a reverence that gives a classic quality to its every scene whether of beauty or of squalor. They look upon other and larger cities without apology or envy and gain thereby a commanding dignity that can come only from self-respect and respect for one's native soil.

As some of the most Athenian Athenians were born in other cities, so Frank Norris, one of the great San Franciscans, was born in Chicago. But he studied at the University of California and he died in San Francisco. And there seems to me to be a special authenticity and vividness in his novels concerned with San Francisco, though his greatest fame and success came from his epics of Illinois.

For many years the name of Frank Norris meant to me that of an epic bard who chanted of the oceanic overwhelming tides of wheat and the tremendous war of man against mankind and nature.

Then I read *McTeague* and saw him as the realist unafraid, dealing cynically in raw meat and the sordor of poverty and lowly ambitions.

Next I happened on *Moran of the Lady Letty* and recognized the third phase of his tripartite genius. And I must say that, while *The Octopus* and *The Pit* make me bow in homage to him as a giant, and *McTeague* wins my terrified respect for him as a master of the uglier truths, the book of his that wins my love is *Moran of the Lady Letty*.

This might be expected of one who prefers *Joseph Andrews* to *Tom Jones* and *Medea* to *Prometheus Bound*.

Medea was a kind of Moran. She, too, was an un-

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couth but magnificent barbarian who took a long voyage on a ship, outwitted her pursuers, and was capable of fierce hatreds and revenges. And Medea, too, was rescued from the evils of earth in a mysterious grand exit perhaps a little less majestic and poetic than Moran's, even though an Athenian wrote *Medea* and a San Franciscan *Moran*.

The climax of Norris's story has the glorious grief, the soul-cleansing pathos to which the Greeks gave the exceedingly homely name of "catharsis."

It begins with a splendid unimportance. As the author jauntily admits, or boasts, with a ballyhoo that is both disarming and irresistible:

"This is to be a story of a battle, at least one murder, and several sudden deaths. For that reason it begins with a pink tea. . . . This particular tea was intended to celebrate the fact that Josie Herrick had arrived at that time of her life when she was to wear her hair high and her gowns long, and to have a 'day' of her own quite distinct from that of her mother."

To-day nobody has "days" and all the mothers have short hair and hardly any skirts at all. But we are as excitable over voyages for hidden treasure as people were then, as they were indeed when Jason went sailing for the golden fleece and fell in with the woman who was his ruin as he hers.

The hunt for hidden treasures of gold, of wisdom, or of religion has engaged the loftiest minds and the noblest authors, and Norris's book is in grand company.

His young idler trying to while away an hour on the wharves before he goes to a tea party is not kept waiting long for something to happen. By the sixth page he is drunk and drugged, shanghaied, beaten up, and fastened down.

Like millions of readers I cannot tell a centreboard from a starboard and I shall never understand why

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sailors quaintly call a rope a sheet; and yet a whiff of sea air has on me the effect of laughing gas. I don't like brutes on land, but I love them on shipboard, and I am ravished with a peculiar delight when a hulking beast knocks a charming young man into the lee scuppers or something and chains him to the marlinspike or the top royal gallants until his spirit is broken.

Out at sea where they can never telephone for the police, or even call in the neighbours, there is an ineluctable suspense about the least frown, and whenever the captain menacingly shifts his quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other my heart goes into my mouth and shifts from cheek to cheek likewise.

There is no daintiness in Norris's rough men. "The captain knocked him down with a blow of one enormous fist upon the mouth and while he was yet stretched upon the deck kicked him savagely in the stomach. Then he allowed him to rise, caught him by the neck and the slack of his overcoat, and ran him forward to where a hatchway, not two feet across, opened on the deck. Without ado, he flung him down into the darkness below."

It may be noted in passing that almost all of these words are one syllabled and Anglo-Saxon. They make for vigour.

One may not approve such a captain but he must respect him as a peril. The hero went aboard "silk-hatted, melton-overcoated, patent-booted, and gloved in suèdes." Two minutes later there emerged upon the deck a figure in oilskins and a sou'wester. The next moment this "Lilee of the Vallee" is heaving the anchor with six Chinamen.

Fortunately the hero knows nothing of ships and the reader is educated with him in dramatic lessons inflicted as the boat rolls on.

The novel begins and ends in the unsurpassed splen-

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dour of the Bay of San Francisco, and before the hero is dragged out of it, one reads such phrases as these:

"The sea began building up in deadly earnest . . . a gigantic dull green roller broke like a Niagara over the schooner's bows, smothering the decks knee-deep in a twinkling . . . the water began to talk beneath the bowsprit."

One falls in love with that schooner: "calling impatiently for the wind, chafing at its absence like a child reft of a toy . . . she scooped the nor'wester in the hollow palms of her tense canvas . . . rope-ends flogged the hollow deck till it reverberated like a drum-head . . . the schooner rolled lazily southward with the leisurely nonchalance of a grazing ox . . . the schooner hung motionless under bare sticks, resting apparently upon her inverted shadow only."

Then the woman appears, dressed as a boy and more powerful than the hero:

"Her face was red and the glint of blue ice was in her eyes . . . savage, splendid, dominant, superb, in her wrath at their weakness, their cowardice. Her heavy brows were knotted over her flaming eyes, her hat was gone and her thick bands of yellow hair whipped across her face . . . her forearm strong, round, and white as scud, the hand and wrist so tanned as to look almost like a glove . . . her hair, her neck, her entire personality exhaled a fine, sweet, natural redolence that savoured of the ocean and great winds . . . Her purity was the purity of primeval glaciers . . . to such a girl the love of a man would appear only in the light of a humiliation, a degradation . . . Moran, sea-rover, virgin unconquered, without law, without land, without sex—was, after all, a woman."

The adventures that follow are worthy of such a magnificent heroine. The strange wild landscapes are themselves personages of nobility or mercilessness and

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the author is man enough to portray them so that they live and exert upon the reader the influence they exerted upon the many strange people engaged in the honourable or the hideous businesses that make up this superb volume.

Among all the blood-quickenings and blood-curdling conflicts with man or beast or storm or circumstance, the one that held me most in thrall was the "sea mystery." It made my flesh creep. On a night of utter calm when "the moon was down, the sky one powder of stars," and not a breath of wind, the schooner began to rise right out of the sea—"that sickening, uncanny lifting of the schooner out of the glassy water."

This thrill I place among the things I can never forget, and I almost begrudge the reader who approaches that scene for the first time a sensation that will never be old to me but can never again be new.

Then there is the discovery of the mass of ambergris, through whose aromatic smell "the schooner seemed to swim in a bath of perfumed air; the membrane of the nostrils fairly sprinkled with the sensation."

Then there is the whirlwind scene where the hero, now a giant, and the brawny heroine fight each other with all their might and main.

And the Chinamen who——

But I am running on as garrulously as a chairman using up in his introduction all the time allotted to the guest of honour, and I will make way with a last word of gratitude to the author, who is dead yet living, for the hours of enchantment his winged words have given me; and a word of pride in being permitted to congratulate the reader who approaches this perfect story for the first time—but not the last. This is one of those pure fountains of inspiration where whosoever drinks will come back to drink again.

RUPERT HUGHES.

BLIX

BLIX

CHAPTER I

IT HAD just struck nine from the cuckoo clock that hung over the mantelpiece in the dining room, when Victorine brought in the halved watermelon and set it in front of Mr. Bessemer's plate. Then she went down to the front door for the damp, twisted roll of the Sunday morning's paper, and came back and rang the breakfast-bell for the second time.

As the family still hesitated to appear, she went to the bay window at the end of the room, and stood there for a moment looking out. The view was wonderful. The Bessemers lived upon the Washington Street hill, almost at its very summit, in a flat in the third story of the building. The contractor had been clever enough to reverse the position of kitchen and dining room, so that the latter room was at the rear of the house. From its windows one could command a sweep of San Francisco Bay and the Contra Costa shore, from Mount Diablo, along past Oakland, Berkeley, Saucelito, and Mount Tamalpais, out to the Golden Gate, the Presidio, the ocean, and even—on very clear days—to the Farallone islands.

For some time Victorine stood looking down at the great expanse of land and sea, then faced about with an impatient exclamation.

On Sundays all the week-day *régime* of the family was deranged, and breakfast was a movable feast, to be had any time after seven or before half-past nine. As Victorine was pouring the ice-water, Mr. Bessemer

himself came in, and addressed himself at once to his meal, without so much as a thought of waiting for the others.

He was a little round man. He wore a skull-cap to keep his bald spot warm, and read his paper through a reading-glass. The expression of his face, wrinkled and bearded, the eyes shadowed by enormous gray eyebrows, was that of an amiable gorilla.

Bessemer was one of those men who seem entirely disassociated from their families. Only on rare and intense occasions did his paternal spirit or instincts assert themselves. At table he talked but little. Though devotedly fond of his eldest daughter, she was a puzzle and a stranger to him. His interests and hers were absolutely dissimilar. The children he seldom spoke to but to reprove; while Howard, the son, the ten-year-old and terrible infant of the household, he always referred to as "that boy."

He was an abstracted, self-centred old man, with but two hobbies—homœopathy and the mechanism of clocks. But he had a strange way of talking to himself in a low voice, keeping up a running, half-whispered comment upon his own doings and actions; as, for instance, upon this occasion: "Nine o'clock—the clock's a little fast. I think I'll wind my watch. No, I've forgotten my watch. Watermelon this morning, eh? Where's a knife? I'll have a little salt. Victorine's forgot the spoons—ah, here's a spoon! No, it's a knife I want."

After he had finished his watermelon, and while Victorine was pouring his coffee, the two children came in, scrambling to their places, and drumming on the table with their knife-handles.

The son and heir, Howard, was very much a boy. He played baseball too well to be a very good boy, and for the sake of his own self-respect maintained an at-

titude of perpetual revolt against his older sister, who, as much as possible, took the place of the mother, long since dead. Under her supervision, Howard blacked his own shoes every morning before breakfast, changed his underclothes twice a week, and was dissuaded from playing with the dentist's son who lived three doors below and who had St. Vitus's dance.

His little sister was much more tractable. She had been christened Alberta, and was called Snooky. She promised to be pretty when she grew up, but was at this time in that distressing transitional stage between twelve and fifteen; was long-legged, and endowed with all the awkwardness of a colt. Her shoes were still innocent of heels; but on those occasions when she was allowed to wear her tiny first pair of corsets she was exalted to an almost celestial pitch of silent ecstasy. The clasp of the miniature stays around her small body was like the embrace of a little lover, and awoke in her ideas that were as vague, as immature and unformed, as the straight little figure itself.

When Snooky and Howard had seated themselves, but one chair—at the end of the breakfast-table, opposite Mr. Bessemer—remained vacant.

"Is your sister—is Miss Travis going to have her breakfast now? Is she got up yet?" inquired Victorine of Howard and Snooky, as she pushed the cream pitcher out of Howard's reach. It was significant of Mr. Bessemer's relations with his family that Victorine did not address her question to him.

"Yes, yes, she's coming," said both the children, speaking together; and Howard added: "Here she comes now."

Travis Bessemer came in. Even in San Francisco, where all women are more or less beautiful, Travis passed for a beautiful girl. She was young, but tall as most men, and solidly, almost heavily built. Her

shoulders were broad, her chest was deep, her neck round and firm. She radiated health; there were exuberance and vitality in the very touch of her foot upon the carpet, and there was that cleanliness about her, that freshness, that suggested a recent plunge in the surf and a "constitutional" along the beach. One felt that here were stamina, good physical force, and fine animal vigour. Her arms were large, her wrists were large, and her fingers did not taper. Her hair was of a brown so light as to be almost yellow. In fact, it would be safer to call it yellow from the start—not golden nor flaxen, but plain, honest yellow. The skin of her face was clean and white, except where it flushed to a most charming pink upon her smooth, cool cheeks. Her lips were full and red, her chin very round and a little salient. Curiously enough, her eyes were small—small, but of the deepest, deepest brown, and always twinkling and alight, as though she were just ready to smile or had just done smiling, one could not say which. And nothing could have been more delightful than those sloe-brown, glinting little eyes of hers set off by her white skin and yellow hair.

She impressed one as being a very normal girl: nothing morbid about her, nothing nervous or false or overwrought. You did not expect to find her introspective. You felt sure that her mental life was not at all the result of thoughts and reflections germinating from within, but rather of impressions and sensations that came to her from without. There was nothing extraordinary about Travis. She never had her vagaries, was not moody—depressed one day and exalted the next. She was just a good, sweet, natural, healthy-minded, healthy-bodied girl, honest, strong, self-reliant, and good-tempered.

Though she was not yet dressed for church, there was style in her to the pointed tips of her patent-leather

slippers. She wore a heavy black overskirt that rustled in delicious fashion over the coloured silk skirt beneath, and a white shirt-waist, striped black, and starched to a rattling stiffness. Her neck was swathed tight and high with a broad ribbon of white satin, while around her waist, in place of a belt, she wore the huge dog-collar of a St. Bernard—a chic little idea which was all her own, and of which she was very proud.

She was as trig and trim and crisp as a crack yacht: not a pin was loose, not a seam that did not fall in its precise right line; and with every movement there emanated from her a barely perceptible delicious feminine odour—an odour that was in part perfume, but mostly a subtle, vague smell, charming beyond words, that came from her hair, her neck, her arms—her whole sweet personality. She was nineteen years old.

She sat down to breakfast and ate heartily, though with her attention divided between Howard—who was atrociously bad, as usual of a Sunday morning—and her father's plate. Mr. Bessemer was as like as not to leave the table without any breakfast at all unless his fruit, chops, and coffee were actually thrust under his nose.

"Papum," she called, speaking clear and distinct, as though to the deaf, "there's your coffee there at your elbow; be careful, you'll tip it over. Victorine, push his cup farther on the table. Is it strong enough for you, Papum?"

"Eh? Ah, yes—yes—yes," murmured the old man, looking vaguely about him, "coffee, to be sure"—and he emptied the cup at a single draught, hardly knowing whether it was coffee or tea. "Now, I'll take a roll," he continued, in a monotonous murmur. "Where are the rolls? Here they are. Hot rolls are bad for my digestion—I ought to eat bread. I think I eat too much. Where's my place in the paper?—always lose my place

in the paper. Clever editorials this fellow Eastman writes, unbiassed by party prejudice—unbiassed—unbiassed." His voice died to a whisper.

The breakfast proceeded, Travis supervising everything that went forward, even giving directions to Victorine as to the hour for serving dinner. It was while she was talking to Victorine as to this matter that Snooky began to whine.

"Stop!"

"And tell Maggie," pursued Travis, "to fricassee her chicken, and not to have it too well done——"

"Sto-o-op!" whined Snooky again.

"And leave the heart out for Papum. He likes the heart——"

"Sto-o-op!"

"Unbiassed by prejudice," murmured Mr. Bessemer, "vigorous and to the point. I'll have another roll."

"Pa, make Howard stop!"

"Howard!" exclaimed Travis; "what is it now?"

"Howard's squirting watermelon-seeds at me," whined Snooky, "and Pa won't make him stop."

"Oh, I didn't so!" vociferated Howard. "I only held one between my fingers, and it just kind of shot out."

"You'll come upstairs with me in just five minutes," announced Travis, "and get ready for Sunday-school."

Howard knew that his older sister's decisions were as the laws of the Persians, and found means to finish his breakfast within the specified time, though not without protest. Once upstairs, however, the usual Sunday-morning drama of despatching him to Sunday-school in presentable condition was enacted. At every moment his voice could be heard uplifted in shrill expostulation and debate. No, his hands were clean enough, and he didn't see why he had to wear that little old pink tie; and, oh! his new shoes were too tight and hurt his sore toe; and he wouldn't, he wouldn't—no, not if he were

killed for it, change his shirt. Not for a moment did Travis lose her temper with him. But "very well," she declared at length, "the next time she saw that little Miner girl she would tell her that he had said she was his beau-heart. *Now* would he hold still while she brushed his hair?"

At a few minutes before eleven Travis and her father went to church. They were Episcopalians, and for time out of mind had rented a half-pew in the church of their denomination on California Street, not far from Chinatown. By noon the family reassembled at dinner-table, where Mr. Bessemer ate his chicken-heart—after Travis had thrice reminded him of it—and expressed himself as to the sermon and the minister's theology: sometimes to his daughter and sometimes to himself.

After dinner Howard and Snooky foregathered in the nursery with their beloved lead soldiers; Travis went to her room to write letters; and Mr. Bessemer sat in the bay window of the dining room reading the paper from end to end.

At five Travis bestirred herself. It was Victorine's afternoon out. Travis set the table, spreading a cover of blue denim edged with white braid, which showed off the silver and the set of delft—her great and never-ending joy—to great effect. Then she tied her apron about her, and went into the kitchen to make the mayonnaise dressing for the potato salad, to slice the ham, and to help the cook (a most inefficient Irish person, taken on only for that month during the absence of the family's beloved and venerated Sing Wo) in the matter of preparing the Sunday-evening tea.

Tea was had at half-past five. Never in the history of the family had its *menu* varied: cold ham, potato salad, pork and beans, canned fruit, chocolate, and the inevitable pitcher of ice-water.

In the absence of Victorine, Maggie waited on the table, very uncomfortable in her one good dress and stiff white apron. She stood off from the table, making awkward dabs at it from time to time. In her excess of deference she developed a clumsiness that was beyond all expression. She passed the plates upon the wrong side, and remembered herself with a broken apology at inopportune moments. She dropped a spoon, she spilt the ice-water. She handled the delft cups and platters with an exaggerated solicitude, as though they were glass bombs. She brushed the crumbs into their laps instead of into the crumb-tray, and at last, when she had set even Travis's placid nerves in a jangle, was dismissed to the kitchen, and retired with a gasp of unspeakable relief.

Suddenly there came a prolonged trilling of the electric bell, and Howard flashed a grin at Travis. Snooky jumped up and pushed back, crying out: "I'll go! I'll go!"

Mr. Bessemer glanced nervously at Travis. "That's Mr. Rivers, isn't it, daughter?" Travis smiled. "Well, I think I'll—I think I'd better——" he began.

"No," said Travis, "I don't want you to, Papum; you sit right where you are. How absurd!"

The old man dropped obediently back into his seat.

"That's all right, Maggie," said Travis as the cook reappeared from the pantry. "Snooky went."

"Huh!" exclaimed Howard, his grin widening. "Huh!"

"And remember one thing, Howard," remarked Travis calmly; "don't you ever again ask Mr. Rivers for a nickel to put in your bank."

Mr. Bessemer roused up. "Did that boy do that?" he inquired sharply of Travis.

"Well, well, he won't do it again," said Travis sooth-

ingly. The old man glared for an instant at Howard, who shifted uneasily in his seat. But meanwhile Snooky had clamoured down to the outside door, and before anything further could be said young Rivers came into the dining room.

CHAPTER II

FOR some reason, never made sufficiently clear, Rivers's parents had handicapped him from the baptismal font with the prænomen of Condé, which, however, upon Anglo-Saxon tongues, had been promptly modified to Condyl, or even, amongst his familiar and intimate friends, to Conny. Asked as to his birthplace—for no Californian assumes that his neighbour is born in the State—Condyl was wont to reply that he was "bawn 'n' rais'" in Chicago; "but," he always added, "I couldn't help that, you know." His people had come West in the early 'eighties, just in time to bury the father in alien soil. Condyl was an only child. He was educated at the State University, had a finishing year at Yale, and a few months after his return home was taken on the staff of the San Francisco *Daily Times* as an associate editor of its Sunday supplement. For Condyl had developed a taste and talent in the matter of writing. Short stories were his mania. He had begun by an inoculation of the Kipling virus, had suffered an almost fatal attack of Harding Davis, and had even been affected by Maupassant. He "went in" for accuracy of detail; held that if one wrote a story involving firemen one should have, or seem to have, every detail of the department at his fingers' ends, and should "bring in" to the tale all manner of technical names and cant phrases.

Much of his work on the Sunday supplements of the *Times* was of the hack order—special articles, write-ups, and interviews. About once a month, however, he wrote a short story, and of late, now that he was convalescing from Maupassant and had begun to be

somewhat himself, these stories had improved in quality, and one or two had even been copied in the Eastern journals. He earned \$100 a month.

When Snooky had let him in, Rivers dashed up the stairs of the Bessemers' flat, two at a time, tossed his stick into a porcelain cane-rack in the hall, wrenched off his overcoat with a single movement, and precipitated himself, panting, into the dining room, tugging at his gloves.

He was twenty-eight years old—nearly ten years older than Travis; tall and somewhat lean; his face smooth-shaven and pink all over, as if he had just given it a violent rubbing with a crash towel. Unlike most writing folk, he dressed himself according to prevailing custom. But Condyl overdid the matter. His scarfs and cravats were too bright, his coloured shirt-bosoms were too broadly barred, his waistcoats too extreme. Even Travis, as she rose to his abrupt entrance, told herself that of a Sunday evening a pink shirt and scarlet tie were a combination hardly to be forgiven.

Condyl shook her hand in both of his, then rushed over to Mr. Bessemer, exclaiming between breaths: "Don't get up, sir—don't *think* of it! Heavens! I'm disgustingly late. You're all through. My watch—this beastly watch of mine—I can't imagine how I came to be so late. You did quite right not to wait."

Then as his morbidly keen observation caught a certain look of blankness on Travis's face, and his rapid glance noted no vacant chair at table, he gave a quick gasp of dismay.

"Heavens and earth! didn't you *expect* me?" he cried. "I thought you said—I thought—I must have forgotten—I must have got it mixed up somehow. What a hideous mistake, what a blunder! What a fool I am!"

He dropped into a chair against the wall and mopped his forehead with a blue-bordered handkerchief.

"Well, what difference does it make, Condyl?" said Travis quietly. "I'll put another place for you."

"No, no!" he vociferated, jumping up. "I won't hear of it, I won't permit it! You'll think I did it on purpose!"

Travis ignored his interference, and made a place for him opposite the children, and had Maggie make some more chocolate.

Condyl meanwhile covered himself with opprobrium.

"And all this trouble—I always make trouble everywhere I go. Always a round man in a square hole, or a square man in a round hole."

He got up and sat down again, crossed and recrossed his legs, picked up little ornaments from the mantelpiece, and replaced them without consciousness of what they were, and finally broke the crystal of his watch as he was resetting it by the cuckoo clock.

"Hello!" he exclaimed suddenly; "where did you get that clock? Where did you get that clock? That's new to me. Where did that come from?"

"That cuckoo clock?" inquired Travis, with a stare. "Condyl Rivers, you've been here and in this room at least twice a week for the last year and a half, and that clock, and no other, has always hung there."

But already Condyl had forgotten or lost interest in the clock.

"Is that so? is that so?" he murmured absent-mindedly, seating himself at the table.

Mr. Bessemer was murmuring: "That clock's a little fast. I cannot make that clock keep time. Victorine has lost the key. I have to wind it with a monkey-wrench. Now I'll try some more beans. Maggie has put in too much pepper. I'll have to have a new key made tomorrow."

"Hey? Yes—yes. Is that so?" answered Condyl Rivers, bewildered, wishing to be polite, yet unable to follow the old man's mutterings.

"He's not talking to you," remarked Travis, without lowering her voice. "You know how Papum goes on. He won't hear a word you say. Well, I read your story in this morning's *Times*."

A few moments later, while Travis and Condyl were still discussing this story, Mr. Bessemer rose. "Well, Mr. Rivers," he announced, "I guess I'll say good-night. Come, Snooky."

"Yes, take her with you, Papum," said Travis. "She'll go to sleep on the lounge here if you don't. Howard, have you got your lessons for to-morrow?"

It appeared that he had not. Snooky whined to stay up a little longer, but at last consented to go with her father. They all bade Condyl good-night and took themselves away, Howard lingering a moment in the door in the hope of the nickel he dared not ask for. Maggie reappeared to clear away the table.

"Let's go in the parlour," suggested Travis, rising. "Don't you want to?"

The parlour was the front room overlooking the street, and was reached by the long hall that ran the whole length of the flat, passing by the door of each one of its eight rooms in turn.

Travis preceded Condyl, and turned up one of the burners in a coloured globe of the little brass chandelier.

The parlour was a small affair, peopled by a family of chairs and sofas robed in white druggets. A gold-and-white effect had been striven for throughout the room. The walls had been tinted instead of papered, and bunches of hand-painted pink flowers tied up with blue ribbons straggled from one corner of the ceiling. Across one angle of the room straddled a brass easel upholding a crayon portrait of Travis at the age of nine, "enlarged from a photograph." A yellow drape ornamented one corner of the frame, while another

drape of blue depended from one end of the mantelpiece.

The piano, upon which nobody ever played, balanced the easel in an opposite corner. Over the mantelpiece hung in a gilded frame a steel engraving of Priscilla and John Alden; and on the mantel itself two bisque figures of an Italian fisher boy and girl kept company with the clock, a huge timepiece, set in a red plush palette, that never was known to go. But at the right of the fireplace, and balancing the tuft of pampa-grass, to the left, was an inverted section of a sewer-pipe painted blue and decorated with daisies. Into it was thrust a sheaf of cat-tails, gilded, and tied with a pink ribbon.

Travis dropped upon the shrouded sofa, and Condyl set himself carefully down on one of the frail chairs with its spindling golden legs, and they began to talk.

Condy had taken her to the theatre the Monday night of that week, as had been his custom ever since he had known her well, and there was something left for them to say on that subject. But in ten minutes they had exhausted it. An engagement of a girl known to both of them had just been announced. Condyl brought that up, and kept conversation going for another twenty minutes, and then filled in what threatened to be a gap by telling her stories of the society reporters, and how they got inside news by listening to telephone party wires for days at a time. Travis's condemnation of this occupied another five or ten minutes; and so what with this and with that they reached nine o'clock. Then decidedly the evening began to drag. It was too early to go. Condyl could find no good excuse for taking himself away, and, though Travis was good-natured enough, and met him more than halfway, their talk lapsed, and lapsed, and lapsed. The breaks became more numerous and lasted longer.

Condy began to wonder if he was boring her. No sooner had the suspicion entered his head than it hardened into a certainty, and at once what little fluency and freshness he yet retained forsook him on the spot. What made matters worse was his recollection of other evenings that of late he had failed in precisely the same manner. Even while he struggled to save the situation Condy was wondering if they two were talked out—if they had lost charm for each other. Did he not know Travis through and through by now—her opinions, her ideas, her convictions? Was there any more freshness in her for him? Was their little flirtation of the last eighteen months, charming as it had been, about to end? Had they played out the play, had they come to the end of each other's resources? He had never considered the possibility of this before; but all at once as he looked at Travis—looked fairly into her little brown-black eyes—it was borne in upon him that she was thinking precisely the same thing.

Condy Rivers had met Travis at a dance a year and a half before this, and, because she was so very pretty, so unaffected, and so good-natured, had found means to see her three or four times a week ever since. They two "went out" not a little in San Francisco society, and had been in a measure identified with what was known as the Younger Set; though Travis was too young to come out, and Rivers too old to feel very much at home with girls of twenty and boys of eighteen.

They had known each other in the conventional way (as conventionality goes in San Francisco); during the season Rivers took her to the theatres Monday nights, and called regularly Wednesdays and Sundays. Then they met at dances, and managed to be invited to the same houses for teas and dinners. They had flirted rather desperately, and at times Condy even told himself that he loved this girl so much younger than he

—this girl with the smiling eyes and robust figure and yellow hair, who was so frank, so straightforward, and so wonderfully pretty.

But evidently they had come to the last move in the game; and as Condyl reflected that after all he had never known the real Travis, that the girl whom he told himself he knew through and through was only the Travis of dinner parties and afternoon functions, he was surprised to experience a sudden qualm of deep and genuine regret. He had never been *near* to her, after all. They were as far apart as when they had first met. And yet he knew enough of her to know that she was "worth while." He had had experience—all the experience he wanted—with other older women and girls of society. They were sophisticated, they were all a little tired, they had run the gamut of amusements—in a word, they were jaded. But Travis, this girl of nineteen, who was not yet even a *débutante*, had been fresh and unspoiled, had been new and strong and young.

"Of course you may call it what you like. He was nothing more nor less than intoxicated—yes, drunk."

"Hah! who—what—wh—what are you talking about?" gasped Condyl, sitting bolt upright.

"Jack Carter," answered Travis. "No," she added, shaking her head at him helplessly, "he hasn't been listening to a word. I'm talking about Jack Carter and the 'Saturday Evening' last night."

"No, no, I haven't heard. Forgive me; I was thinking—thinking of something else. Who was drunk?"

Travis paused a moment, settling her side-combs in her hair; then:

"If you will try to listen, I'll tell it all over again, because it's serious with me, and I'm going to take a very decided stand about it. You know," she went on—"you know what the 'Saturday Evening' is. Plenty

of the girls who are not 'out' belong, and a good many of last year's *débutantes* come, as well as the older girls of three or four seasons' standing. You could call it representative, couldn't you? Well, they always serve punch; and you know yourself that you have seen men there who have taken more than they should."

"Yes, yes," admitted Condyl. "I know Carter and the two Catlin boys always do."

"It gets pretty bad sometimes, doesn't it?" she said.

"It does, it does—and it's shameful. But most of the girls—*most* of them—don't seem to mind."

Miss Bessemer stiffened a bit. "There are one or two girls that do," she said quietly. "Frank Catlin had the decency to go home last night," she continued; "and his brother wasn't any worse than usual. But Jack Carter must have been drinking before he came. He was very bad indeed—as bad," she said between her teeth, "as he could be and yet walk straight. As you say, most of the girls don't mind. They say, 'It's only Johnnie Carter; what do you expect?' But one of the girls—you know her, Laurie Flagg—cut a dance with him last night and told him exactly why. Of course Carter was furious. He was sober enough to think he had been insulted; and what do you suppose he did?"

"What? what?" exclaimed Condyl, breathless, leaning toward her.

"Went about the halls and dressing rooms circulating some dirty little lie about Laurie. Actually trying to—to"—Travis hesitated—"to make a scandal about her."

Condyl bounded in his seat. "Beast, cad, swine!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't think," said Travis, "that Carter would so much as dare to ask me to dance with him——"

"Did he? did—did——"

"Wait," she interrupted. "So I wasn't at all pre-

pared for what happened. During the german, before I knew it, there he was in front of me. It was a break, and he wanted it. I hadn't time to think. The only idea I had was that if I refused him he might tell some dirty little lie about me. I was all confused—mixed up. I felt just as though it were a snake that I had to humour to get rid of. I gave him the break."

Condy sat speechless. Suddenly he arose.

"Well, now, let's see," he began, speaking rapidly, his hands twisting and untwisting till the knuckles cracked. "Now, let's see. You leave it to me. I know Carter. He's going to be at a stag dinner where I am invited to-morrow night, and I—I——"

"No, you won't, Condy," said Travis placidly. "You'll pay no attention to it, and I'll tell you why. Suppose you should make a scene with Mr. Carter—I don't know how men settle these things. Well, it would be told in all the clubs and in all the newspaper offices that two men had quarrelled over a girl; and my name is mentioned, discussed, and handed around from one crowd of men to another, from one club to another; and then, of course, the papers take it up. By that time Mr. Carter will have told his side of the story and invented another dirty little lie, and I'm the one who suffers the most in the end. And remember, Condy, that I haven't any mother in such an affair, not even an older sister. No, we'll just let the matter drop. It would be more dignified, anyhow. Only I have made up my mind what I am going to do."

"What's that?"

"I'm not coming out. If that's the sort of thing one has to put up with in society"—Travis drew a little line on the sofa at her side with her finger-tip—"I am going to—stop—right—there. It's not"—Miss Bessemer stiffened again—"that I'm afraid of Jack Carter and his dirty stories; I simply don't want to

know the kind of people who have made Jack Carter possible. The other girls don't mind it, nor many men besides you, Condyl; and I'm not going to be associated with people who take it as a joke for a man to come to a function drunk. And as for having a good time, I'll find my amusements somewhere else. I'll ride a wheel, take long walks, study something. But as for leading the life of a society girl—no! And whether I have a good time or not, I'll keep my own self-respect. At least I'll never have to dance with a drunken man. I won't have to humiliate myself like that a second time."

"But I presume you will still continue to go out somewhere," protested Condyl Rivers.

She shook her head.

"I have thought it all over, and I've talked about it with Papum. There's no halfway about it. The only way to stop is to stop short. Just this afternoon I've regretted three functions for next week, and I shall resign from the 'Saturday Evening.' Oh, it's not the Jack Carter affair alone!" she exclaimed; "the whole thing tires me. Mind, Condyl," she concluded, "I'm not going to break with it because I have any 'purpose in life,' or that sort of thing. I want to have a good time, and I'm going to see if I can't have it in my own way. If the kind of thing that makes Jack Carter possible is conventionality, then I'm done with conventionality for good. I am going to try, from this time on, to be just as true to myself as I can be. I am going to be sincere, and not pretend to like people and things that I don't like; and I'm going to do the things that I like to do—just so long as they are the things a good girl can do. See, Condyl?"

"You're fine," murmured Condyl, breathless. "You're fine as gold, Travis, and I—I love you all the better for it."

"Ah, *now*," exclaimed Travis, with a brusque

movement, "there's another thing we must talk about. No more foolishness between us. We've had a jolly little flirtation, I know, and it's been good fun while it lasted. I know you like me, and you know that I like you; but as for loving each other, you know we don't. Yes, you say that you love me and that I'm the only girl. That's part of the game. I can play it"—her little eyes began to dance—"quite as well as you. But it's playing with something that's quite too serious to be played with—after all, isn't it, now? It's insincere, and, as I tell you, from now on I'm going to be as true and as sincere and as honest as I can."

"But I tell you that I *do* love you," protested Condyl, trying to make the words ring true.

Travis looked about the room an instant as if in deliberation; then abruptly: "Ah! what am I going to *do* with such a boy as you are, after all—a great, big, overgrown boy? Condyl Rivers, look at me straight in the eye. Tell me, do you honestly love me? You know what I mean when I say 'love.' Do you love me?"

"No, I don't!" he exclaimed blankly, as though he had just discovered the fact.

"There!" declared Travis—"and I don't love you." They both began to laugh.

"Now," added Travis, "we don't need to have the burden and trouble of keeping up the pretences any more. We understand each other, don't we?"

"This is queer enough," said Condyl drolly.

"But isn't it an improvement?"

Condyl scoured his head.

"Tell me the truth," she insisted; "*you* be sincere."

"I do believe it is. Why—why—Travis—by Jingo! Travis, I think I'm going to like you better than ever now."

"Never mind. Is it an agreement?"

"What is?"

"That we don't pretend to love each other any more?"

"All right—yes—you're right; because the moment I began to love you I should like you so much less."

She put out her hand. "That's an agreement, then."

Condy took her hand in his. "Yes, it's an agreement." But when, as had been his custom, he made as though to kiss her hand, Travis drew it quickly away.

"No! no!" she said firmly, smiling for all that—"no more foolishness."

"But—but," he protested, "it's not so radical as that, is it? You're not going to overturn such time-worn, time-honoured customs as that? Why, this is a regular rebellion."

"No, sire," quoted Travis, trying not to laugh, "it is a revolution."

CHAPTER III

ALTHOUGH Monday was practically a holiday for the Sunday-supplement staff of the *Times*, Condry Rivers made a point to get down to the office betimes the next morning. There were reasons why a certain article descriptive of a great whaleback steamer taking on grain for famine-stricken India should be written that day, and Rivers wanted his afternoon free in order to go to Laurie Flagg's coming-out tea.

But as he came into his room at the *Times* office, which he shared with the exchange and sporting editors, and settled himself at his desk, he suddenly remembered that, under the new order of things, he need not expect to see Travis at the Flaggs'.

"Well," he muttered, "maybe it doesn't make so much difference, after all. She was a corking fine girl, but—might as well admit it—the play is played out. Of course I don't love her—any more than she loves me. I'll see less and less of her now. It's inevitable, and after a while we'll hardly even meet. In a way, it's a pity; but of course one has to be sensible about these things. . . . Well, this whaleback now."

He rang up the Chamber of Commerce, and found out that the *City of Everett*, which was the whaleback's name, was at the Mission Street wharf. This made it possible for him to write the article in two ways. He either could fake his copy from a clipping on the subject which the exchange editor had laid on his desk, or he could go down in person to the wharf, interview the captain, and inspect the craft for him-

self. The former was the short and easy method. The latter was more troublesome, but would result in a far more interesting article.

Condy debated the subject a few minutes, then decided to go down to the wharf. San Francisco's waterfront was always interesting, and he might get hold of a photograph of the whaleback. All at once the "idea" of the article struck him, the certain underlying notion that would give importance and weight to the mere details and descriptions. Condy's enthusiasm flared up in an instant.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed; "by Jove!"

He clapped on his hat wrong side foremost, crammed a sheaf of copy-paper into his pocket, and was on the street again in another moment. Then it occurred to him that he had forgotten to call at his club that morning for his mail, as was his custom, on the way to the office. He looked at his watch. It was early yet, and his club was but two blocks' distance. He decided that he would get his letters at the club, and read them on the way down to the wharf.

For Condy had joined a certain San Francisco club of artists, journalists, musicians, and professional men that is one of the institutions of the city, and, in fact, famous throughout the United States. He was one of the younger members, but was popular and well liked, and on more than one occasion had materially contributed to the fun of the club's "low jinks."

In his box this morning he found one letter that he told himself he must read upon the instant. It bore upon the envelope the name of a New York publishing house to whom Condy had sent a collection of his short stories about a month before. He took the letter into the "round window" of the club, overlooking the street, and tore it open excitedly. The fact that he had received a letter from the firm without the return of

his manuscript seemed a good omen. This was what he read:

CONDÉ RIVERS, Esq., Bohemian Club,
San Francisco, Cal.

DEAR SIR: We return to you by this mail the manuscript of your stories, which we do not consider as available for publication at the present moment. We would say, however, that we find in several of them indications of a quite unusual order of merit. The best-selling book just now is the short novel—say thirty thousand words—of action and adventure. Judging from the stories of your collection, we suspect that your talent lies in this direction, and we would suggest that you write such a novel and submit the same to us.

Very respectfully,

THE CENTENNIAL CO.
New York.

Condy shoved the letter into his pocket and collapsed limply into his chair.

"What's the good of trying to do anything anyhow!" he muttered, looking gloomily down into the street. "My level is just the hack-work of a local Sunday supplement, and I am a fool to think of anything else."

His enthusiasm in the matter of the *City of Everett* was cold and dead in a moment. He could see no possibilities in the subject whatever. His "idea" of a few minutes previous seemed ridiculous and overwrought. He would go back to the office and grind out his copy from the exchange editor's clipping.

Just then his eye was caught by a familiar figure in trim, well-fitting black halted on the opposite corner waiting for the passage of a cable-car. It was Travis Bessemer. No one but she could carry off such rigorous simplicity in the matter of dress so well: black skirt, black Russian blouse, tiny black bonnet and black veil, white kids with black stitching. Simplicity itself. Yet the style of her, as Condy Rivers told himself, flew up and hit you in the face; and her figure—was there anything more perfect? and the soft pretty effect of her

yellow hair seen through the veil—could anything be more fetching? and her smart carriage and the fling of her fine broad shoulders, and—no, it was no use; Condyl had to run down to speak to her.

"Come, come," she said as he pretended to jostle against her on the curbstone without noticing her; "*you* had best go to work. Loafing at ten o'clock on the street-corners—the idea!"

"It *is* not—it cannot be—and yet it is—it is *she*," he burlesqued; "and after all these years!" Then in his natural voice: "Hello, T. B."

"Hello, C. R."

"Where are you going?"

"Home. I've just run down for half an hour to have the head of my banjo tightened."

"If I put you on the car, will you expect me to pay your car-fare?"

"Condyl Rivers, I've long since got over the idea of ever expecting you to have any change concealed about your person."

"Huh! no, it all goes for theatre-tickets, and flowers and boxes of candy for a certain girl I know. But"—and he glared at her significantly—"no more foolishness."

She laughed. "What are you 'on' this morning, Condyl?"

Condyl told her as they started to walk toward Kearney Street.

"But why *don't* you go to the dock and see the vessel, if you can make a better article that way?"

"Oh, what's the good! The Centennial people have turned down my stories."

She commiserated him for this; then suddenly exclaimed:

"No, you must go down to the dock! You ought to, Condyl. Oh, I tell you, let me go down with you!"

In an instant Condyl leaped to the notion. "Splendid!

splendid! no reason why you shouldn't!" he exclaimed. And within fifteen minutes the two were treading the wharfs and quays of the city's water-front.

Ships innumerable nuzzled at the endless line of docks, mast overspiring mast, and bowsprit overlapping bowsprit, till the eye was bewildered, as if by the confusion of branches in a leafless forest. In the distance the mass of rigging resolved itself into a solid gray blur against the sky. The great hulks, green and black and slate gray, laid themselves along the docks, straining leisurely at their mammoth chains, their flanks opened, their cargoes, as it were their entrails, spewed out in a wild disarray of crate and bale and box. Sailors and stevedores swarmed them like vermin. Trucks rolled along the wharfs like peals of ordnance, the horse-hoofs beating the boards like heavy drum-taps. Chains clanked, a ship's dog barked incessantly from a companionway, ropes creaked in complaining pulleys, blocks rattled, hoisting-engines coughed and strangled, while all the air was redolent of oakum, of pitch, of paint, of spices, of ripe fruit, of clean cool lumber, of coffee, of tar, of bilge, and the brisk, nimble odour of the sea.

Travis was delighted, her little brown eyes snapping, her cheeks flushing, as she drank in the scene.

"To think," she cried, "where all these ships have come from! Look at their names; aren't they perfect? Just the names, see: the *Mary Baker*, Hull; and the *Anandale*, Liverpool; and the *Two Sisters*, Calcutta; and see that one they're calking, the *Montevideo*, Callao; and there, look! look! the very one you're looking for, the *City of Everett*, San Francisco."

The whaleback, an immense tube of steel plates, lay at her wharf, sucking in entire harvests of wheat from the San Joaquin valley—harvests that were to feed strangely clad skeletons on the southern slopes of the

Himalaya foot-hills. Travis and Condyl edged their way among piles of wheat-bags, dodging drays and rumbling trucks, and finally brought up at the after gang-plank, where a sailor halted them. Condyl exhibited his reporter's badge.

"I represent the *Times*," he said, with profound solemnity, "and I want to see the officer in charge."

The sailor fell back upon the instant.

"Power of the press," whispered Condyl to Travis as the two gained the deck.

A second sailor directed them to the mate, whom they found in the chart-room, engaged, singularly enough, in trimming the leaves of a scraggly geranium.

Condyl explained his mission with flattering allusions to the whaleback and the novelty of the construction. The mate—an old man with a patriarchal beard—softened at once, asked them into his own cabin aft, and even brought out a camp-stool for Travis, brushing it with his sleeve before setting it down.

While Condyl was interviewing the old fellow, Travis was examining, with the interest of a child, the details of the cabin: the rack-like bunk, the wash-stand, ingeniously constructed so as to shut into the bulkhead when not in use, the alarm-clock screwed to the wall, and the array of photographs thrust into the mirror between frame and glass. One, an old daguerreotype, particularly caught her fancy. It was the portrait of a very beautiful girl, wearing the old-fashioned side curls and high comb of a half-century previous. The old mate noticed the attention she paid to it, and, as soon as he had done giving information to Condyl, turned and nodded to Travis, and said quietly: "She was pretty, wasn't she?"

"Oh, very!" answered Travis, without looking away.

There was a silence. Then the mate, his eyes wide and thoughtful, said with a long breath:

"And she was just about your age, miss, when I saw her; and you favour her, too."

Condy and Travis held their breaths in attention. There in the cabin of that curious nondescript whale-back they had come suddenly to the edge of a romance—a romance that had been lived through before they were born. Then Travis said in a low voice, and sweetly: "She died?"

"Before I ever set eyes on her, miss. That is, *maybe* she died. I sometimes think—fact is, I really believe she's alive yet, and waiting for me." He hesitated awkwardly. "I dunno," he said, pulling his beard. "I don't usually tell that story to strange folk; but you remind me so of her that I guess I will."

Condy sat down on the edge of the bunk, and the mate seated himself on the plush settle opposite the door, his elbows on his knees, his eyes fixed on a patch of sunlight upon the deck outside.

"I began life," he said, "as a deep-sea diver—began pretty young, too. I first put on the armour when I was twenty, nothing but a lad; but I could take the pressure up to seventy pounds even then. One of my first dives was off Trincomalee, on the coast of Ceylon. A mail packet had gone down in a squall with all on board. Six of the bodies had come up and had been recovered, but the seventh hadn't. It was the body of the daughter of the governor of the island—a beautiful young girl of nineteen, whom everybody loved. I was sent for to go down and bring the body up. Well, I went down. The packet lay in a hundred feet of water, and that's a wonderful deep dive. I had to go down twice. The first time I couldn't find anything, though I went all through the berth-deck. I came up to the wrecking-float and reported that I had seen nothing. There were a lot of men there belonging to the wrecking gang, and some correspondents of London papers. But they would

have it that she was below, and had me go down again. I did, and this time I found her."

The mate paused a moment.

"I'll have to tell you," he went on, "that when a body don't come to the surface it will stand or sit in a perfectly natural position until a current or movement of the water around touches it. When that happens—well, you'd say the body was alive; and old divers have a superstition—no, it *ain't* just a superstition, I believe it's so—that drowned people really don't die till they come to the surface, and the air touches them. We say that the drowned who don't come up still have some sort of life of their own, way down there in all that green water . . . some kind of life . . . surely . . . surely. When I went down the second time, I came across the door of what I thought at first was the linen-closet. But it turned out to be a little stateroom. I opened it. There was the girl. She was sitting on the sofa opposite the door, with a little hat on her head, and holding a satchel in her lap, just as if she was ready to go ashore. Her eyes were wide open, and she was looking right at me and smiling. It didn't seem terrible or ghastly in the least. She seemed very sweet. When I opened the door it set the water in motion, and she got up and dropped the satchel, and came toward me smiling and holding out her arms.

"I stepped back quick and shut the door, and sat down in one of the saloon chairs to fetch my breath, for it had given me a start. The next thing to do was to send her up. But I began to think. She seemed so pretty as she was. What was the use of bringing her up—up there on the wrecking-float with that crowd of men—up where the air would get at her, and where they would put her in the ground along o' the worms? If I left her there she'd always be sweet and pretty—always be nineteen; and I remembered what old divers

said about drowned people living just so long as they stayed below. You see, I was only a lad then, and things like that impress you when you're young. Well, I signalled to be hauled up. They asked me on the float if I'd seen anything, and I said no. That was all there was to the affair. They never raised the ship, and in a little while it was all forgotten.

"But I never forgot it, and I always remembered her, 'way down there in all that still green water, waiting there in that little stateroom for me to come back and open the door. And I've growed to be an old man remembering her; but she's always stayed just as she was the first day I saw her, when she came toward me smiling and holding out her arms. She's always stayed young and fresh and pretty. I never saw her but that once. Only afterward I got her picture from a native woman of Trincomalee who was housekeeper at the Residency where the governor of the island lived. Somehow I never could care for other women after that, and I ain't never married for that reason."

"No, no, of course not!" exclaimed Travis, in a low voice, as the old fellow paused.

"Fine, fine; oh, fine as gold!" murmured Condyl, under his breath.

"Well," said the mate, getting up and rubbing his knee, "that's the story. Now you know all about that picture. Will you have a glass of Madeira, miss?"

He got out a bottle of wine bearing the genuine Funchal label and filled three tiny glasses. Travis pushed up her veil, and she and Condyl rose.

"This is to *her*," said Travis gravely.

"Thank you, miss," answered the mate, and the three drank in silence.

As Travis and Condyl were going down the gang-plank they met the captain of the whaleback coming up.

"I saw you in there talking to old McPherson," he explained. "Did you get what you wanted from him?"

"More, more!" exclaimed Condry.

"My hand in the fire, he told you that yarn about the girl who was drowned off Trincomalee. Of course, I knew it. The old boy's wits are turned on that subject. He *will* have it that the body hasn't decomposed in all this time. Good seaman enough, and a first-class navigator, but he's soft in that one spot."

CHAPTER IV

OH, but the *story* of it!" exclaimed Condyl as he and Travis regained the wharf—"the story of it! Isn't it a ripper! Isn't it a corker! His leaving her that way, and never caring for any other girl afterward."

"And so original!" she commented, quite as enthusiastic as he.

"Original?—why, it's new as paint! It's—it's—Travis, I'll make a story out of this that will be copied in every paper between the two oceans."

They were so interested in the mate's story that they forgot to take a car, and walked up Clay Street talking it over, suggesting, rearranging, and embellishing; and Condyl was astonished and delighted to note that she "caught on" to the idea as quickly as he, and knew the telling points and what details to leave out. "And I'll make a bang-up article out of the whaleback herself," declared Condyl. The "idea" of the article had returned to him, and all his enthusiasm with it.

"And look here," he said, showing her the letter from the Centennial Company. "They turned down my book, but see what they say."

"Quite an unusual order of merit!" cried Travis. "Why, that's fine! Why didn't you show this to me before?—and asking you like this to write them a novel of adventure! What *more* can you want? Oh!" she exclaimed impatiently, "that's so like you; you would tell everybody about your reverses, and carry on about them yourself, but never say a word when you get a little boom. Have you an idea for a thirty-thousand-word novel? Wouldn't that diver's story do?"

"No, there's not enough in that for thirty thousand words. I haven't any idea at all—never wrote a story of adventure—never wrote anything longer than six thousand words. But I'll keep my eye open for something that will do. By the way—by Jove! Travis, where are we?"

They looked swiftly around them, and the bustling, breezy water-front faded from their recollections. They were in a world of narrow streets, of galleries and overhanging balconies. Craziest structures, riddled and honeycombed with stairways and passages, shut out the sky, though here and there rose a building of extraordinary richness and most elaborate ornamentation. Colour was everywhere. A thousand little notes of green and yellow, of vermilion and sky-blue, assaulted the eye. Here it was a doorway, here a vivid glint of cloth or hanging, here a huge scarlet sign lettered with gold, and here a kaleidoscopic effect in the garments of a passer-by. Directly opposite, and two stories above their heads, a sort of huge "loggia", one blaze of gilding and crude vermilions, opened in the gray cement of a crumbling façade, like a sudden burst of flame. Gigantic pot-bellied lanterns of red and gold swung from its ceiling, while along its railing stood a row of pots—brass, ruddy bronze, and blue porcelain—from which were growing red, saffron, purple, pink, and golden tulips without number. The air was vibrant with unfamiliar noises. From one of the balconies near at hand, though unseen, a gong, a pipe, and some kind of stringed instrument wailed and thundered in unison. There was a vast shuffling of padded soles and a continuous interchange of singsong monosyllables, high-pitched and staccato, while from every hand rose the strange aromas of the East—sandalwood, punk, incense, oil, and the smell of mysterious cookery.

"Chinatown!" exclaimed Travis. "I hadn't the

faintest idea we had come up so far. Condyl Rivers, do you know what time it is?" She pointed a white kid finger through the doorway of a drug-store, where, amid lacquer boxes and bronze urns of herbs and dried seeds, a round Seth Thomas marked half-past two.

"And your lunch?" cried Condyl. "Great heavens! I never thought."

"It's too late to get any at home. Never mind; I'll go somewhere and have a cup of tea."

"Why not get a package of Chinese tea, now that you're down here, and take it home with you?"

"Or drink it here."

"Where?"

"In one of the restaurants. There wouldn't be a soul there at this hour. I know they serve tea any time. Condyl, let's try it. Wouldn't it be fun?"

Condyl smote his thigh. "Fun!" he vociferated; "fun! It is—by Jove—it would be *heavenly*! Wait a moment. I'll tell you what we will do. Tea won't be enough. We'll go down to Kearney Street, or to the market, and get some crackers to go with it."

They hurried back to the California market, a few blocks distant, and bought some crackers and a wedge of new cheese. On the way back to Chinatown Travis stopped at a music-store on Kearney Street to get her banjo, which she had left to have its head tightened; and thus burdened they regained the "town," Condyl grieving audibly at having to carry "brown-paper bundles through the street."

"First catch your restaurant," said Travis as they turned into Dupont Street with its thronging coolies and swarming, gayly clad children. But they had not far to seek.

"Here you are!" suddenly exclaimed Condyl, halting in front of a wholesale tea-house bearing a sign in Chinese and English. "Come on, Travis!"

They ascended two flights of a broad, brass-bound staircase leading up from the ground floor, and gained the restaurant on the top story of the building. As Travis had foretold, it was deserted. She clasped her gloved hands gayly, crying: "Isn't it delightful! We've the whole place to ourselves."

The restaurant ran the whole depth of the building, and was finished off at either extremity with a gilded balcony, one overlooking Dupont Street and the other the old Plaza. Enormous screens of gilded ebony, intricately carved and set with coloured glass panes, divided the room into three, and one of these divisions, in the rear part, from which they could step out upon the balcony that commanded the view of the Plaza, they elected as their own.

It was charming. At their backs they had the huge, fantastic screen, brave and fine with its coat of gold. In front, through the glass-paved valves of a pair of folding doors, they could see the roofs of the houses beyond the Plaza and, beyond these the blue of the bay with its anchored ships, and even beyond this the faint purple of the Oakland shore. On either side of these doors, in deep alcoves, were divans with mattings and head-rests for opium-smokers. The walls were painted blue and hung with vertical Cantonese legends in red and silver, while all around the sides of the room small ebony tables alternated with ebony stools, each inlaid with a slab of mottled marble. A chandelier, all a-glitter with tinsel, swung from the centre of the ceiling over a huge round table of mahogany.

And not a soul was there to disturb them. Below them, out there around the old Plaza, the city drummed through its work with a lazy, soothing rumble. Nearer at hand, Chinatown sent up the vague murmur of the life of the Orient. In the direction of the Mexican quarter, the bell of the cathedral knolled at intervals. The

sky was without a cloud and the afternoon was warm.

Condy was inarticulate with the joy of what he called their "discovery." He got up and sat down. He went out into the other room and came back again. He dragged up a couple of the marble-seated stools to the table. He took off his hat, lit a cigarette, let it go out, lit it again, and burned his fingers. He opened and closed the folding doors, pushed the table into a better light, and finally brought Travis out upon the balcony to show her the "points of historical interest" in and around the Plaza.

"There's the Stevenson memorial ship in the centre, see; and right there, where the flagstaff is, General Baker made the funeral oration over the body of Terry. Broderick killed him in a duel—or was it Terry killed Broderick? I forget which. Anyhow, right opposite, where that pawnshop is, is where the Overland stages used to start in '49. And every other building that fronts on the Plaza, even this one we're in now, used to be a gambling-house in bonanza times; and, see, over yonder is the Morgue and the City Prison."

They turned back into the room, and a great, fat Chinaman brought them tea on Condy's order. But besides tea, he brought dried almonds, pickled watermelon rinds, candied quince, and "China nuts."

Travis cut the cheese into cubes with Condy's pen-knife, and arranged the cubes in geometric figures upon the crackers.

"But, Condy," she complained, "why in the world did you get so many crackers? There's hundreds of them here—enough to feed a regiment. Why didn't you ask me?"

"Huh! what? what? I don't know. What's the matter with the crackers? You were dickering with the cheese, and the man said, 'How many crackers?' I didn't know. I said, 'Oh, give me a quarter's worth!'"

"And we couldn't possibly have eaten ten cents' worth! Oh, Condyl, you are—you are—— But never mind, here's your tea. I wonder if this green, pasty stuff is good."

They found that it was, but so sweet that it made their tea taste bitter. The watermelon rinds were flat to the Western palates, but the dried almonds were a great success. Then Condyl promptly got the hiccoughs from drinking his tea too fast, and fretted up and down the room like a chicken with the pip till Travis grew faint and weak with laughter.

"Oh, well," he exclaimed aggrievedly, "laugh, that's right! *I* don't laugh. It isn't such fun when you've got 'em yoursel—*hulp*."

"But sit down, for goodness' sake! You make me so nervous. You can't walk them off. Sit down and hold your breath while you count nine. Condyl, I'm going to take off my gloves and veil. What do you think?"

"Sure, of course; and I'll have a cigarette. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Well, what's that in your hand now?"

"By Jove, I have been smoking! I—I beg your pardon. I'm a regular stable boy. I'll throw it away."

Travis caught his wrist. "What nonsense! I would have told you before if I'd minded."

"But it's gone out!" he exclaimed. "I'll have another."

As he reached into his pocket for his case, his hand encountered a paper-covered volume, and he drew it out in some perplexity.

"Now, how in the wide world did that book come in my pocket?" he muttered, frowning. "What have I been carrying it around for? I've forgotten. I declare I have."

"What book is it?"

"Hey? book? . . . h'm," he murmured, staring.

Travis pounded on the table. "Wake up, Condyl, I'm talking to you," she called.

"It's *Life's Handicap*," he answered, with a start; "but why and but why have I——"

"What's it about? I never heard of it," she declared.

"You never heard of *Life's Handicap*?" he shouted; "you never heard—you never—you mean to say you never heard—but here, this won't do. Sit right still, and I'll read you one of these yarns before you're another minute older. Any one of them—open the book at random. Here we are—'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes'; and it's a stem-winder, too."

And then for the first time in her life, there in that airy, golden Chinese restaurant, in the city from which he hasted to flee, Travis Bessemer fell under the charm of the little spectacled colonial, to whose song we all must listen and to whose pipe we all must dance.

There was one "point" in the story of Jukes' strange ride that Condyl prided himself upon having discovered. So far as he knew, all critics had overlooked it. It is where Jukes is describing the man-trap of the City of the Dead, who are alive, and mentions that the slope of the enclosing sandhills was "about forty-five degrees." Jukes was a civil engineer, and Condyl held that it was a capital bit of realism on the part of the author to have him speak of the pitch of the hills in just such technical terms. At first he thought he would call Travis's attention to this bit of cleverness; but as he read he abruptly changed his mind. He would see if she would find it out for herself. It would be a test of her quickness, he told himself; almost an unfair test, because the point was extremely subtle and could easily be ignored by the most experienced of fiction readers. He read steadily on, working himself into a positive excitement as he approached the passage. He

came to it and read it through without any emphasis, almost slurring over it in his eagerness to be perfectly fair. But as he began to read the next paragraph, Travis, her little eyes sparkling with interest and attention, exclaimed:

"Just as an engineer would describe it. Isn't that good!"

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Condyl, slamming down the book joyfully. "Travis, you are one in a thousand!"

"What—what is it?" she inquired blankly.

"Never mind, never mind; you're a wonder, that's all,"—and he finished the tale without further explanation. Then, while he smoked another cigarette and she drank another cup of tea, he read to her "The Return of Imri" and the "Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney." He found her an easy and enrapt convert to the little Englishman's creed, and for himself tasted the intense delight of revealing to another an appreciation of a literature hitherto ignored.

"Isn't he strong!" cried Travis. "Just a *little* better than Marie Corelli and the Duchess!"

"And to think of having all those stories to read! You haven't read any of them yet?"

"Not a one. I've been reading only the novels we take up in the Wednesday class."

"Lord!" muttered Condyl.

Condyl's spirits had been steadily rising since the incident aboard the whaleback. The exhilaration of the water-front, his delight over the story he was to make out of the old mate's yarn, Chinatown, the charming unconventionality of their lunch in the Chinese restaurant, the sparkling serenity of the afternoon, and the joy of discovering Travis's appreciation of his adored and venerated author, had put him into a mood bordering close upon hilarity.

"The next event upon our interesting programme,"

he announced, "will be a banjosephine obligato in A-sia minor, by that justly renowned impresario, Signor Conde Tin-pani Rivers, specially engaged for this performance; with a pleasing and pan-hellenic song-and-dance turn by Miss Travis Bessemer, the infant phenomenon, otherwise known as 'Babby Bessie.'"

"You're not going to play that banjo here?" said Travis, as he stripped away the canvas covering.

"Order in the gallery!" cried Condyl, beginning to tune up. Then in a rapid, professional monotone: "Ladies-and-gentlemen-with-your-kind-permission-I will-endeavour-to-give-you-an-imitation-of-a-Carolina-coon-song,"—and without more ado, singing the words to a rattling, catchy accompaniment, swung off into—

"F—or *my* gal's a high-born leddy,
She's brack, but not too shady."

He did not sing loud, and the clack and snarl of the banjo carried hardly farther than the adjoining room; but there was no one to hear, and, as he went along, even Travis began to hum the words. But at that, Condyl stopped abruptly, laid the instrument across his knees with exaggerated solicitude, and said deliberately:

"Travis, you are a good, sweet girl, and what you lack in beauty you make up in amiability, and I've no doubt you are kind to your aged father; but you—can—not—sing."

Travis was cross in a moment, all the more so because Condyl had spoken the exact truth. It was quite impossible for her to carry a tune half-a-dozen bars without entangling herself in as many different keys. What voice she had was not absolutely bad; but as she persisted in singing in spite of Condyl's guying, he put back his head and began a mournful and lugubrious howling.

"Ho!" she exclaimed, grabbing the banjo from his

knees, "if I can't sing, I can play better than some smart people."

"Yes, by note," railed Condyl, as Travis executed a banjo "piece" of no little intricacy. "That's just like a machine—like a hand-piano."

"Order in the gallery!" she retorted, without pausing in her playing. She finished with a great flourish and gazed at him in triumph, only to find him pretending a profound slumber. "O—o—o!" she remarked between her teeth, "I just hate you, Condyl Rivers."

"There are others," he returned airily.

"Talk about slang."

"Now what will we do?" he cried. "Let's *do* something. Suppose we break something—just for fun."

Then suddenly the gayety went out of his face, and he started up and clapped his hand to his head with a gasp of dismay. "Great Heavens!" he exclaimed.

"Condyl," cried Travis in alarm, "what is it?"

"The Tea!" he vociferated. "Laurie Flagg's Tea. I ought to be there—right this minute."

Travis fetched a sigh of relief. "Is that all?"

"All!" he retorted. "All! Why, it's past four now—and I'd forgotten every last thing." Then suddenly falling calm again, and quietly resuming his seat: "I don't see as it makes any difference. I won't go, that's all. Push those almonds here, will you, Miss Lady?—But we aren't *doing* anything," he exclaimed, with a brusque return of exuberance. "Let's do things. What'll we do? Think of something. Is there anything we can break?" Then, without any transition, he vaulted upon the table and began to declaim, with tremendous gestures:

"There once was a beast called an Ounce,
Who went with a spring and a bounce.
His head was as flat
As the head of a cat,

This quadrupetantical Ounce,

—tical Ounce,

This quadrupetantical Ounce.

"You'd think from his name he was small,

But that was not like him at all.

He weighed, I'll be bound,

Three or four hundred pound,

And he looked most uncommonly tall,

monly—tall,

And he looked most uncommonly tall."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Travis, pounding on the table. "Hear, hear—none, Brutus, none."

Condy sat down on the table and swung his legs. But during the next few moments, while they were eating the last of their cheese, his good spirits fell rapidly away from him. He heaved a sigh, and thrust both hands gloomily into his pockets.

"Cheese, Condy?" asked Travis.

He shook his head with a dark frown, muttering: "No cheese, no cheese."

"What's wrong, Condy, what's the matter?" asked Travis, with concern.

For some time he would not tell her, answering all her inquiries by closing his eyes and putting his chin in the air, nodding his head in knowing fashion.

"But what is it?"

"You don't respect me," he muttered; and for a long time this was all that could be got from him. No, no, she did not respect him; no, she did not take him seriously.

"But of course I do. Why don't I? Condy Rivers, what's got into you *now*?"

"No, no; I know it. I can tell. You don't take me seriously. You don't respect me."

"But why?"

"Make a blooming buffoon of myself," he mumbled tragically.

In great distress Travis laboured to contradict him. Why, they had just been having a good time, that was all. Why, she had been just as silly as he. Condyl caught at the word.

"Silly! There, I knew it. I told you. I'm silly. I'm a buffoon. But haven't we had a great afternoon?" he added, with a sudden grin.

"I never remember," announced Travis emphatically, "when I've had a better time than I've had to-day; and I know just why it's been such a success."

"Why, then?"

"Because we've had no foolishness. We've just been ourselves, and haven't pretended we were in love with each other when we are not. Condyl, let's do this lots."

"Do what?"

"Go round to queer little, interesting little places. We've had a glorious time to-day, haven't we?—and we haven't been talked out once."

"As we were last night, for instance," he hazarded.

"I *thought* you felt it, the same as I did. It *was* a bit awful, wasn't it?"

"It was."

"From now on, let's make a resolution. I know you've had a good time to-day. Haven't you had a better time than if you had gone to the Tea?"

"Well, *rather*. I don't know when I've had a better, jollier afternoon."

"Well, now, we're going to try to have lots more good times, but just as chums. We've tried the other, and it failed. Now be sincere; didn't it fail?"

"It worked out. It *did* work out."

"Now from this time on, no more foolishness. We'll just be chums."

"Chums it is. No more foolishness."

"The moment you begin to pretend you're in love with me, it will spoil everything. It's funny," said

Travis, drawing on her gloves. "We're doing a funny thing, Condyl. With ninety-nine people out of one hundred, this little affair would have been all ended after our 'explanation' of last night—confessing, as we did, that we didn't love each other. Most couples would have 'drifted apart'; but here we are, planning to be chums, and have good times in our own original, unconventional way—and we can do it, too. There, there, he's a thousand miles away. He's not heard a single word I've said. Condyl, are you listening to me?"

"Blix," he murmured, staring at her vaguely. "Blix—you look that way; I don't know, look kind of blix. Don't you feel sort of blix?" he inquired anxiously.

"Blix?"

He smote the table with his palm. "Capital!" he cried; "sounds bully, and snappy, and crisp, and bright, and sort of sudden. Sounds—don't you know, *this way?*"—and he snapped his fingers. "Don't you see what I mean? Blix, that's who you are. You've always been Blix, and I've just found it out. Blix," he added, listening to the sound of the name. "Blix, Blix. Yes, yes; that's your name."

"Blix?" she repeated; "but why Blix?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not."

"Well, then," he declared, as though that settled the question. They made ready to go, as it was growing late.

"Will you tie that for me, Condyl," she asked, rising and turning the back of her head toward him, the ends of the veil held under her fingers. "Not too tight. Condyl, don't pull it so tight. There, there, that will do. Have you everything that belongs to you? I know you'll go away and leave something here. There's your cigarette-case, and your book, and of course the banjo."

As if warned by a mysterious instinct, the fat Chinaman made his appearance in the outer room. Condyl

put his fingers into his vest pocket, then dropped back upon his stool with a suppressed exclamation of horror.

"Condy!" exclaimed Blix in alarm, "are you sick?"—for he had turned a positive white.

"I haven't a cent of money," he murmured faintly. "I spent my last quarter for those beastly crackers. What's to be done? What *is* to be done? I'll—I'll leave him my watch. Yes, that's the only thing."

Blix calmly took out her purse. "I expected it," she said resignedly. "I knew this would happen sooner or later, and I always have been prepared. How much is it, John?" she asked of the Chinaman.

"Hefadollah."

"I'll never be able to look you in the face again," protested Condy. "I'll pay you back to-night. I will! I'll send it up by a messenger boy."

"Then you *would* be a buffoon."

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "Don't, it humiliates me to the dust."

"Oh, come along and don't be so absurd! It must be after five."

Halfway down the brass-bound stairs, he clapped his hand to his head with a start.

"And *now* what is it?" she inquired meekly.

"Forgotten, forgotten!" he exclaimed. "I knew I would forget something."

"*I* knew it, you mean."

He ran back, and returned with the great bag of crackers, and thrust it into her hands. "Here, here, take these. We mustn't leave these," he declared earnestly. "It would be a shameful waste of money"; and in spite of all her protests, he insisted upon taking the crackers along.

"I wonder," said Blix, as the two skirted the Plaza, going down to Kearney Street; "I wonder if I ought to ask him to supper?"

"Ask who—me?—how funny to——"

"I wonder if we are talked out—if it would spoil the day?"

"Anyhow, I'm going to have supper at the Club; and I've got to write my article some time to-night."

Blix fixed him with a swift glance of genuine concern. "Don't play to-night, Condyl," she said, with a sudden gravity.

"Fat lot *I* can play! What money have I got to play with?"

"You might get some somewhere. But, anyhow, promise me you won't play."

"Well, of course I'll promise. How can I, if I haven't any money? And besides, I've got my whaleback stuff to write. I'll have supper at the Club, and go up in the library and grind out copy for a while."

"Condy," said Blix, "I think that diver's story is almost too good for the *Times*. Why don't you write it and send it East? Send it to the Centennial Company, why don't you? They've paid some attention to you now, and it would keep your name in their minds if you sent the story to them, even if they didn't publish it. Why don't you think of that?"

"Fine—great idea! I'll do that. Only I'll have to write it out of business hours. It will be extra work."

"Never mind, you do it; and," she added, as he put her on the cable car, "keep your mind on that thirty-thousand-word story of adventure. Good-bye, Condy; haven't we had the jolliest day that ever was?"

"Couldn't have been better. Good-bye, Blix."

Condy returned to his club. It was about six o'clock. In response to his question, the hall-boy told him that Tracy Sargeant had arrived a few moments previously, and had been asking for him.

The Saturday of the week before, Condy had made an engagement with young Sargeant to have supper

together that night, and perhaps go to the theatre afterward. And now at the sight of Sargeant in the "round window" of the main room, buried in the file of the *Gil Blas*, Condyl was pleased to note that neither of them had forgotten the matter.

Sargeant greeted him with extreme cordiality as he came up, and at once proposed a drink. Sargeant was a sleek, well-groomed, well-looking fellow of thirty, just beginning to show the effects of a certain amount of dissipation in the little puffs under the eyes and the faint blueness of the temples. The sudden death of his father, for which event Sargeant was still mourning, had left him in such position that his monthly income was about five times as large as Condyl's salary. The two had supper together, and Sargeant proposed the theatre.

"No, no; I've got to work to-night," asserted Condyl.

After dinner, while they were smoking their cigars in a window of the main room, one of the hall-boys came up and touched Condyl on the arm.

"Mr. Eckert, and Mr. Hendricks, and Mr. George Hands, and several other of those gentlemen are up in the card-room, and are asking for you and Mr. Sargeant."

"Why, I didn't know the boys were here! They've got a game going, Condyl. Let's go up and get in. Shall we?"

Condyl remembered that he had no money. "I'm flat broke, Tracy," he announced, for he knew Sargeant well enough to make the confession without wincing. "No, I'll not get in; but I'll go up and watch you a few minutes."

They ascended to the card-room, where the air was heavy and acrid with cigar smoke, and where the silence was broken only by the click of poker-chips. At the end of twenty minutes Condyl was playing, having

borrowed enough money of Sargeant to start him in the game.

Unusually talkative and restless, he had suddenly hardened and stiffened to a repressed, tense calm; speechless, almost rigid in his chair. Excitable under even ordinary circumstances, his every faculty was now keyed to its highest pitch. The nervous strain upon him was like the stretching and tightening of harp-strings, too taut to quiver. The colour left his face, and the moisture fled his lips. His projected article, his promise to Blix, all the jollity of the afternoon, all thought of time or place, faded away as the one indomitable, evil passion of the man leaped into life within him, and lashed and rowelled him with excitement. His world resolved itself to a round green table, columns of tri-coloured chips, and five ever-changing cards that came and went and came again before his tired eyes like the changing, weaving colours of the kaleidoscope. Midnight struck, then one o'clock, then two, three, and four. Still his passion rode him like a hag, spurring the jaded body, rousing up the wearied brain.

Finally, at half-past four, at a time when Condyl was precisely where he had started, neither winner nor loser by so much as a dime, a round of Jack-pots was declared, and the game broke up. Condyl walked home to the uptown hotel where he lived with his mother, and went to bed as the first milk-wagons began to make their appearance and the news-boys to cry the morning papers.

Then, as his tired eyes closed at last, occurred that strange trick of picture-making that the overtaxed brain plays upon the retina. A swift series of pictures of the day's doings began to whirl *through* rather than *before* the pupils of his shut eyes. Condyl saw again a brief vision of the street, and Blix upon the corner waiting to cross; then it was the gay, brisk confusion

of the water-front, the old mate's cabin aboard the whaleback, Chinatown, and a loop of vermilion cloth over a gallery rail, the golden balcony, the glint of the Stevenson ship upon the green Plaza, Blix playing the banjo, the delightful and picturesque confusion of the deserted Chinese restaurant; Blix again, turning her head for him to fasten her veil, holding the ends with her white-kid fingers; Blix once more, walking at his side with her trim black skirt, her round little turban hat, her yellow hair, and her small dark, dancing eyes.

Then, suddenly, he remembered the promise he had made her in the matter of playing that night. He winced sharply at this, and the remembrance of his fault harried and harassed him. In spite of himself, he felt contemptible. Yet he had broken his promises to her in this very matter of playing before—before that day of their visit to the Chinese restaurant—and had felt no great qualm of self-reproach. Had their relations changed? Rather the reverse, for they had done with “foolishness.”

“Never worried me before,” muttered Condry, as he punched up his pillow—“never worried me before. Why should it worry me now—worry me like the devil; and she caught on to that ‘point’ about the slope of forty-five degrees.”

CHAPTER V

CONDY began his week's work for the supplement behindhand. Naturally he overslept himself Tuesday morning, and, not having any change in his pockets, was obliged to walk down to the office. He arrived late, to find the compositors already fretting for copy. His editor promptly asked for the whaleback stuff, and Condy was forced into promising it within a half-hour. It was out of the question to write the article according to his own idea in so short a time; so Condy faked the stuff from the exchange clipping, after all. His description of the boat and his comments upon her mission—taken largely at second hand—served only to fill space in the paper. They were lacking both in interest and in point. There were no illustrations. The article was a failure.

But Condy redeemed himself by a witty interview later in the week with an emotional actress, and by a solemn article—compiled after an hour's reading in Lafcadio Hearn and the *Encyclopædia*—on the "Industrial Renaissance in Japan."

But the idea of the diver's story came back to him again and again, and Thursday night after supper he went down to his club, and hid himself at a corner desk in the library, and, in a burst of enthusiasm, wrote out some two thousand words of it. In order to get the "technical details," upon which he set such store, he consulted the *Encyclopædias* again, and "worked in" a number of unfamiliar phrases and odd-sounding names. He was so proud of the result that he felt he could not wait until the tale was finished and in print

to try its effect. He wanted appreciation and encouragement upon the instant. He thought of Blix.

"She saw the point in Morrowbie Jukes's description of the slope of the sandhill," he told himself; and the next moment had resolved to go up and see her the next evening, and read to her what he had written.

This was on Thursday. All through that week Blix had kept much to herself, and for the first time in two years had begun to spend every evening at home. In the morning of each day she helped Victorine with the upstairs work, making the beds, putting the rooms to rights; or consulted with the butcher's and grocer's boys at the head of the back stairs, or chattered with urbane and smiling Chinamen with their balanced vegetable baskets. She knew the house and its management at her fingers' ends, and supervised everything that went forward. Laurie Flagg coming to call upon her, on Wednesday afternoon, to remonstrate upon her sudden defection, found her in the act of tacking up a curtain across the pantry window.

But Blix had the afternoons and evenings almost entirely to herself. These hours, heretofore taken up with functions and the discharge of obligations, dragged not a little during the week that followed upon her declaration of independence. Wednesday afternoon, however, was warm and fine, and she went to the Park with Snooky. Without looking for it or even expecting it, Blix came across a little Japanese tea-house, or rather a tiny Japanese garden, set with almost toy Japanese houses and pavilions, where tea was served and thin sweetish wafers for five cents. Blix and Snooky went in. There was nobody about but the Japanese serving woman. Snooky was in raptures, and Blix spent a delightful half-hour there, drinking Japanese tea, and feeding the wafers to the carp and gold-fish in the tiny pond immediately below where she sat. A Chinaman, evi-

dently of the merchant class, came in, with a Chinese woman following. As he took his place and the Japanese girl came up to get his order, Blix overheard him say in English: "Bring tea for-um leddy."

"He had to speak in English to her," she whispered; "isn't that splendid! Did you notice that, Snooky?"

On the way home Blix was wondering how she should pass her evening. She was to have made one of a theatre party where Jack Carter was to be present. Then she suddenly remembered "Morrowbie Jukes," "The Return of Imri," and "Krishna Mulvaney." She continued on past her home, downtown, and returned late for supper with *Plain Tales* and *Many Inventions*.

Toward half-past eight there came a titter of the electric bell. At the moment Blix was in the upper chamber of the house of Suddhoo, quaking with exquisite horror at the Seal-cutter's magic. She looked up quickly as the bell rang. It was not Condry Rivers's touch. She swiftly reflected that it was Wednesday night, and that she might probably expect Frank Catlin. He was a fair specimen of the Younger Set, a sort of modified Jack Carter, and called upon her about once a fortnight. No doubt he would hint darkly as to his riotous living during the past few days and refer to his diet of bromoseltzers. He would be slangy, familiar, call her by her first name as many times as he dared, discuss the last dance of the Saturday cotillion, and try to make her laugh over Carter's drunkenness. Blix knew the type. Catlin was hardly out of college; but the older girls, even the young women of twenty-five or -six, encouraged and petted these youngsters, driven to the alternative by the absolute dearth of older men.

"I'm not at home, Victorine," announced Blix, intercepting the maid in the hall. It chanced that it was not Frank Catlin, but another boy of precisely the same breed; and Blix returned to Suddhoo, Mrs. Hawksbee,

and Mulvaney with a little cuddling movement of satisfaction.

"There is only one thing I regret about this," she said to Condry Rivers on the Friday night of that week; "that is, that I never thought of doing it before." Then suddenly she put up her hand to shield her eyes, as though from an intense light, turning away her head abruptly.

"I say, what is it? What—what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

Blix peeped at him fearfully from between her fingers. "He's got it on," she whispered—"that awful crimson scarf."

"Huh!" said Condry, touching his scarf nervously, "it's—it's very swell. Is it too loud?" he asked uneasily.

Blix put her fingers in her ears; then:

"Condry, you're a nice, amiable young man, and, if you're not brilliant, you're good and kind to your aged mother; but your scarfs and neckties are simply impossible."

"Well, look at this room!" he shouted—they were in the parlour. "You needn't talk about bad taste. Those drapes—oh-h! those drapes!! Yellow, s'help me! And those bisque figures that you get with every pound of tea you buy; and this, this, *this*," he whimpered, waving his hands at the decorated sewer-pipe with its gilded cat-tails. "Oh, speak to me of this; speak to me of art; speak to me of æsthetics. Cat-tails, *gilded*. Of course, why not, *gilded*!" He wrung his hands. "'Somewhere people are happy. Somewhere little children are at play——'"

"Oh, hush!" she interrupted. "I know it's bad; but we've always had it so, and I won't have it abused. Let's go into the dining room anyway. We'll sit in there after this. We've always been stiff and constrained in here."

They went out into the dining room, and drew up

a couple of arm-chairs into the bay window, and sat there looking out. Blix had not yet lit the gas—it was hardly dark enough for that; and for upward of ten minutes they sat and watched the evening dropping into night.

Below them the hill fell away so abruptly that the roofs of the nearest houses were almost at their feet; and beyond these the city tumbled raggedly down to meet the bay in a confused, vague mass of roofs, cornices, cupolas, and chimneys, blurred and indistinct in the twilight, but here and there pierced by a new-lit street lamp. Then came the bay. To the east they could see Goat Island, and the fleet of sailing-ships anchored off the water-front; while directly in their line of vision the island of Alcatraz, with its triple crown of forts, started from the surface of the water. Beyond was the Contra Costa shore, a vast streak of purple against the sky. The eye followed its sky-line westward till it climbed, climbed, climbed up a long slope that suddenly leaped heavenward with the crest of Tamalpais, purple and still, looking always to the sunset like a great watching sphinx. Then, farther on, the slope seemed to break like the breaking of an advancing billow, and go tumbling, crumbling downward to meet the Golden Gate—the narrow inlet of green tide-water with its flanking Presidio. But, farther than this, the eye was stayed. Farther than this there was nothing, nothing but a vast, illimitable plain of green—the open Pacific. But at this hour the colour of the scene was its greatest charm. It glowed with all the sombre radiance of a cathedral. Everything was seen through a haze of purple—from the low green hills in the Presidio reservation to the faint red mass of Mount Diablo shrugging its rugged shoulder over the Contra Costa foothills. As the evening faded, the west burned down to a dull red glow that overlaid the blue of the bay with a sheen of ruddy gold.

The foothills of the opposite shore, Diablo, and at last even Tamalpais, resolved themselves in the velvet gray of the sky. Outlines were lost. Only the masses remained, and these soon began to blend into one another. The sky, and land, and the city's huddled roofs were one. Only the sheen of dull gold remained, piercing the single vast mass of purple like the blade of a golden sword.

"There's a ship!" said Blix in a low tone.

A four-master was dropping quietly through the Golden Gate, swimming on that sheen of gold, a mere shadow, specked with lights, red and green. In a few moments her bows were shut from sight by the old fort at the Gate. Then her red light vanished, then the mainmast. She was gone. By midnight she would be out of sight of land, rolling on the swell of the lonely ocean under the moon's white eye.

Condy and Blix sat quiet and without speech, not caring to break the charm of the evening. For quite five minutes they sat, thus watching the stars light one by one, and the immense gray night settle and broaden and widen from mountain-top to horizon. They did not feel the necessity of making conversation. There was no constraint in their silence now.

Gently, and a little at a time, Condy turned his head and looked at Blix. There was just light enough to see. She was leaning back in her chair, her hands fallen into her lap, her head back and a little to one side. As usual, she was in black; but now it was some sort of dinner-gown that left her arms and neck bare. The line of the chin and the throat and the sweet round curve of the shoulder had in them something indescribable—something that was related to music, and that eluded speech. Her hair was nothing more than a warm coloured mist without form or outline. The sloe-brown of her little eyes and the flush of her cheek were mere inferences—like the faintest stars that are never visible

when looked at directly; and it seemed to him that there was disengaged from her something for which there was no name; something that appealed to a mysterious sixth sense—a sense that only stirred at such quiet moments as this; something that was now a dim, sweet radiance, now a faint aroma, and now again a mere essence, an influence, an impression—nothing more. It seemed to him as if her sweet, clean purity and womanliness took a form of *their* own which his accustomed senses were too gross to perceive. Only a certain vague tenderness in him went out to meet and receive this impalpable presence; a tenderness not for her only, but for all the good things of the world. Often he had experienced the same feeling when listening to music. Her sweetness, her goodness, appealed to what he guessed must be the noblest in him. And she was only nineteen. Suddenly his heart swelled, the ache came to his throat and the smart to his eyes.

“Blix,” he said, just above a whisper; “Blix, wish I was a better sort of chap.”

“That’s the beginning of being better, isn’t it, Condyl?” she answered, turning toward him, her chin on her hand.

“It does seem a pity,” he went on, “that when you *want* to do the right, straight thing, and be clean and fine, that you can’t just *be* it, and have it over with. It’s the keeping it up that’s the grind.”

“But it’s the keeping it up, Condyl, that makes you *worth being good* when you finally get to be good; don’t you think? It’s the keeping it up that makes you strong; and then when you get to be good you can make your goodness count. What’s a good man if he’s weak?—if his goodness is better than he is himself? It’s the good man who is strong—as strong as his goodness and who can make his goodness count—who is the right kind of man. That’s what I think.”

"There's something in that, there's something in that." Then, after a pause: "I played Monday night after all, Blix, after promising I wouldn't."

For a time she did not answer, and when she spoke, she spoke quietly: "Well—I'm glad you told me"; and after a little she added, "Can't you stop, Condyl?"

"Why, yes—yes, of course—I—oh, Blix, sometimes I don't know! You can't understand! How could a girl understand the power of it? Other things, I don't say; but when it comes to gambling, there seems to be another *me* that does precisely as he chooses, whether *I* will or not. But I'm going to do my best. I haven't played since, although there was plenty of chance. You see, this card business is only a part of this club life, this city life—like drinking and—other vices of men. If I didn't have to lead the life, or if I didn't go with that crowd—Sargeant and the rest of those men—it would be different; easier, maybe."

"But a man ought to be strong enough to be himself and master of himself anywhere. Condyl, *is* there anything in the world better or finer than a strong man?"

"Not unless it is a good woman, Blix."

"I suppose I look at it from a woman's point of view; but for me, a *strong* man—strong in everything—is the grandest thing in the world. Women love strong men, Condyl. They can forgive a strong man almost anything."

Condyl did not immediately answer, and in the interval an idea occurred to Blix that at once hardened into a determination. But she said nothing at the moment. The spell of the sunset was gone, and they had evidently reached the end of that subject of their talk. Blix rose to light the gas. "Will you promise me one thing, Condyl?" she said. "Don't, if you don't want to. But will you promise me that you will tell me whenever you do play?"

"That I'll promise you!" exclaimed Condyl; "and I'll keep that, too."

"And now, let's hear the story—or what you've done of it."

They drew up to the dining-room table with its cover of blue denim edged with white cord, and Condyl unrolled his manuscript and read through what he had written. She approved, and, as he had foreseen, "caught on" to every one of his points. He was almost ready to burst into cheers when she said:

"Any one reading that would almost believe you had been a diver yourself, or at least had lived with divers. Those little details count, don't they? Condyl, I've an idea. See what you think of it. Instead of having the story end with his leaving her down there and going away, do it this way. Let him leave her there, and then go back after a long time when he gets to be an old man. Fix it up some way to make it natural. Have him go down to see her and never come up again, see? And leave the reader in doubt as to whether it was an accident or whether he did it on purpose."

Condyl choked back a whoop and smote his knee. "Blix, you're the eighth wonder! Magnificent—glorious! Say!"—he fixed her with a glance of curiosity—"you ought to take to story-writing yourself."

"No, no," she retorted significantly. "I'll just stay with my singing and be content with that. But remember that story don't go to the *Times* supplement. At least not until you have tried it East—with the centennial Company, at any rate."

"Well, I guess *not!*" snorted Condyl. "Why, this is going to be one of the best yarns I ever wrote."

A little later on, he inquired with sudden concern: "Have you got anything to eat in the house?"

"I never saw such a man!" declared Blix; "you are always hungry."

"I love to eat," he protested.

"Well, we'll make some creamed oysters; how would that do?" suggested Blix.

Condy rolled his eyes. "Oh, speak to me of creamed oysters!" Then, with abrupt solemnity: "Blix, I never in my life had as many oysters as I could eat."

She made the creamed oysters in the kitchen over the gas-stove, and they ate them there—Condy sitting on the wash-board of the sink, his plate in his lap.

Condy had a way of catching up in his hands whatever happened to be nearest him, and while still continuing to talk, examining it with apparent deep interest. Just now it happened to be the morning's paper that Victorine had left on the table. For five minutes Condy had been picking it up and laying it down, frowning abstractedly at it during the pauses in the conversation. Suddenly he became aware of what it was, and instantly read aloud the first item that caught his glance.

"'Personal.—Young woman, thirty-one, good house-keeper, desires acquaintance respectable middle-aged gentleman. Object, matrimony. Address K. D. B., this office.'—Hum!" he commented, "nothing equivocal about K. D. B.; has the heroism to call herself young at thirty-one. I'll bet she *is* a good housekeeper. Right to the point. If K. D. B. don't see what she wants, she asks for it."

"I wonder," mused Blix, "what kind of people they are who put personals in the papers. K. D. B., for instance; who is she, and what is she like?"

"They're not tough," Condy assured her. "I see 'em often down at the *Times* office. They are usually a plain, matter-of-fact sort, quite conscientious, you know; generally middle-aged—or thirty-one; outgrown their youthful follies and illusions, and want to settle down."

"Read some more," urged Blix. Condy went on:

“‘Bachelor, good habits, twenty-five, affectionate disposition, accomplishments, money, desires acquaintance pretty, refined girl. Object, matrimony. McB. this office.’”

“No, I don’t like McB.,” said Blix. “He’s too—ornamental, somehow.”

“He wouldn’t do for K. D. B., would he?”

“Oh, my, no! He’d make her very unhappy.”

“‘Widower, two children, home-loving disposition, desires introduction to good, honest woman to make home for his children. Matrimony, if suitable. B. P. T., Box A, this office.’”

“He’s not for K. D. B., that’s flat,” declared Blix; “the idea, ‘matrimony if suitable,’—patronizing enough! I know just what kind of an old man B. P. T. is. I know he would want K. D. B. to warm his slippers, and would be fretful and grumpy. B. P. T., just an abbreviation of ‘bumptious.’ No, he can’t have her.”

Condor read the next two or three to himself, despite her protests.

“Condor, don’t be mean! Read them to——”

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “here’s one for K. D. B. Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Listen.

“‘Bachelor, thirty-nine, sober and industrious, retired sea captain, desires acquaintance respectable young woman, good housekeeper, and manager. Object, matrimony. Address Captain Jack, office this paper.’”

“I know he’s got a wooden leg!” cried Blix. “Can’t you just see it sticking out between the lines? And he lives all alone somewhere down near the bay with a parrot——”

“And makes a glass of grog every night.”

“And smokes a long clay pipe.”

“But he chews tobacco.”

“Yes, isn’t it a pity he will chew that nasty, smelly tobacco? But K. D. B. will break him of that.”

"Oh, is he for K. D. B.?"

"Sent by Providence!" declared Blix. "They were born for each other. Just see, K. D. is a good housekeeper and wants a respectable middle-aged gentleman. Captain Jack is a respectable middle-aged gentleman, and wants a good housekeeper. Oh, and besides, I can read between the lines! I just feel they would be congenial. If they know what's best for themselves, they would write to each other right away."

"But wouldn't you love to be there and see them meet!" exclaimed Condyl.

"Can't we fix it up some way," said Blix, "to bring these two together—to help them out in some way?"

Condyl smote the table, and jumped to his feet.

"Write to 'em!" he shouted. "Write to K. D. B. and sign it Captain Jack, and write to Captain Jack——"

"And sign it K. D. B.," she interrupted, catching his idea.

"And have him tell her, and her tell him," he added, "to meet at some place; and then we can go to that place and hide, and watch."

"But how will we know them? How would they know each other? They've never met."

"We'll tell them both to wear a kind of flower. Then we can know them, and they can know each other. Of course, as soon as they began to talk they would find out they hadn't written."

"But they wouldn't care."

"No—they *want* to meet each other. They would be thankful to us for bringing them together."

"Won't it be the greatest fun?"

"Fun! Why, it will be a regular drama. Only we are running the show, and everything is real. Let's get at it!"

Blix ran into her room and returned with writing

material. Condyl looked at the note-paper critically. "This kind's too swell. K. D. B. wouldn't use Irish linen—never! Here, this is better, glazed with blue lines and a flying bird stamped in the corner. Now I'll write for the Captain, and you write for K. D. B."

"But where will we have them meet?"

This was a point. They considered the Chinese restaurant, the Plaza, Lotta's fountain, the Mechanics' Library, and even the cathedral over in the Mexican quarter, but arrived at no decision.

"Did you ever hear of Luna's restaurant?" said Condyl. "By Jove, it's just the place! It's the restaurant where you get Mexican dinners; right in the heart of the Latin quarter; quiet little old-fashioned place, below the level of the street, respectable as a tomb. I was there just once. We'll have 'em meet there at seven in the evening. No one is there at that hour. The place isn't patronized much, and it shuts up at eight. You and I can go there and have dinner at six, say, and watch for them to come."

Then they set to work at their letters.

"Now," said Condyl, "we must have these sound perfectly natural, because if either of these people smell the smallest kind of a rat, you won't catch 'em. You must write not as *you* would write, but as you think *they* would. This is an art, a kind of fiction, don't you see? We must imagine a certain character, and write a letter consistent with that character. Then it'll sound natural. Now, K. D. B. Well, K. D. B., she's prim. Let's have her prim, and proud of using correct, precise, 'elegant' language. I guess she wears mits, and believes in cremation. Let's have her believe in cremation. And Captain Jack; oh! he's got a terrible voice, like this, *row-row-row*, see? and whiskers, very fierce; and he says, 'Belay there!' and 'Avast!' and is very grandiloquent and orotund and gallant when it comes

to women. Oh, he's the devil of a man when it comes to women, is Captain Jack!"

After countless trials and failures, they evolved the two following missives, which Condé posted that night:

CAPTAIN JACK

SIR: I have perused with entire satisfaction your personal in the *Times*. I should like to know more of you. I read between the lines, and my perception ineradicably convinces me that you are honest and respectable. I do not believe I should compromise my self-esteem at all in granting you an interview. I shall be at Luna's restaurant at seven precisely, next Monday eve, and will bear a bunch of white marguerites. Will you likewise, and wear a marguerite in your lapel?

Trusting this will find you in health, I am

Respectfully yours,
K. D. B.

Miss K. D. B.

DEAR MISS: From the modest and retiring description of your qualities and character, I am led to believe that I will find in you an agreeable life companion. Will you not accord me the great favour of a personal interview? I shall esteem it a high honour. I will be at Luna's Mexican restaurant at seven of the clock P.M. on Monday evening next. May I express the fervent hope that you also will be there? I name the locality because it is quiet and respectable. I shall wear a white marguerite in my buttonhole. Will you also carry a bunch of the same flower?

Yours to command,
CAPTAIN JACK.

So great was her interest in the affair that Blix even went out with Condé while he mailed the letters in the nearest box, for he was quite capable of forgetting the whole matter as soon as he was out of the house.

"Now let it work!" she exclaimed as the iron flap clanked down upon the disappearing envelopes. But Condé was suddenly smitten with nameless misgiving. "Now we've done it! now we've done it!" he cried, aghast. "I wish we hadn't. We're in a fine fix now."

Still uneasy, he saw Blix back to the flat, and bade her good-bye at the door.

But before she went to bed that night, Blix sought out her father, who was still sitting up tinkering with the cuckoo clock, which he had taken all to pieces under the pretext that it was out of order and went too fast.

"Papum," said Blix, sitting down on the rug before him, "did you ever—when you were a pioneer, when you first came out here in the 'fifties—did you ever play poker?"

"I—oh, well! it was the only amusement the miners had for a long time."

"I want you to teach me."

The old man let the clock fall into his lap and stared. But Blix explained her reasons.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day was Saturday, and Blix had planned a walk out to the Presidio. But at breakfast, while she was debating whether she should take with her Howard and Snooky, or *Many Inventions*, she received a note from Condyl, sent by special messenger.

All our fun is spoiled [he wrote]. I've got ptomaine poisoning from eating the creamed oysters last night, and am in for a solid fortnight spent in bed. Have passed a horrible night. Can't you look in at the hotel this afternoon? My mother will be here at the time.

"Ptomaine poisoning!" The name had an ugly sound, and Condyl's use of the term implied the doctor's visit. Blix decided that she would put off her walk until the afternoon, and call on Mrs. Rivers at once, and ask how Condyl did.

She got away from the flat about ten o'clock, but on the steps outside met Condyl dressed as if for bicycling, and smoking a cigarette.

"I've got eleven dollars!" he announced cheerily.

"But I thought it was ptomaine poisoning!" she cried with a sudden vexation.

"Pshaw! that's what the doctor says. He's a flapping; nothing but a kind of a sort of a pain. It's all gone now. I'm as fit as a fiddle—and I've got eleven dollars. Let's go somewhere and do something."

"But your work?"

"They don't expect me. When I thought I was going to be sick, I telephoned the office, and they said all right, that they didn't need me. Now I've got eleven dollars, and there are three holidays of perfect weather before us: to-day, to-morrow, and Monday. What will we do?"

What must we do to be saved? Our matrimonial objects don't materialize till Monday night. In the meanwhile, what? Shall we go down to Chinatown—to the restaurant, or to the water-front again? Maybe the mate on the whaleback would invite us to lunch. Or," added Condyl, his eye caught by a fresh-fish peddler who had just turned into the street, "we can go fishing."

"For oysters, perhaps."

But the idea had caught Condyl's fancy.

"Blix!" he exclaimed, "let's go fishing."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Where *do* people fish around here? Where there's water, I presume."

"No, is it possible?" she asked with deep concern. "I thought they fished in their backyards, or in their front parlours perhaps."

"Oh, you be quiet! you're all the time guying me," he answered. "Let me think—let me think," he went on, frowning heavily, scouring at his hair. Suddenly he slapped a thigh.

"Come on," he cried, "I've an idea!" He was already halfway down the steps, when Blix called him back.

"Leave it all to me," he assured her; "trust me *implicitly*. Don't you want to go?" he demanded with abrupt disappointment.

"Want to!" she exclaimed. "Why, it would be the very best kind of fun, but——"

"Well, then, come along."

They took a downtown car.

"I've got a couple of split bamboo rods," he explained as the car slid down the terrific grade of the Washington Street hill. "I haven't used 'em in years—not since we lived East; but they're hand-made, and are tip-top. I haven't any other kind of tackle; but it's just as well, because the tackle will all depend upon where we are going to fish."

"Where's that?"

"Don't know yet; am going down now to find out."

He took her down to the principal dealer in sporting goods on Market Street. It was a delicious world, whose atmosphere and charm were not to be resisted. There were shot-guns in rows, their gray barrels looking like so many organ-pipes; sheaves of fishing-rods, from the four-ounce wisp of the brook-trout up to the rigid eighteen-ounce lance of the king-salmon and sea-bass; show-cases of wicked revolvers, swelling by calibres into the thirty-eight and forty-four man-killers of the plainsmen and Arizona cavalry; hunting knives and dirks, and the slender steel whips of the fencers; files of Winchesters, sleeping quietly in their racks, waiting patiently for the signal to speak the one grim word they knew; swarms of artificial flies of every conceivable shade, brown, gray, black, gray-brown, gray-black, with here and there a brisk vermilion note; coils of line, from the thickness of a pencil, spun to hold the sullen plunges of a jew-fish off the Catalina Islands, down to the sea-green gossamers that a vigorous fingerling might snap; hooks, snells, guts, leaders, gaffs, cartridges, shells, and all the entrancing munitions of the sportsman, that savoured of lonely cañons, deer-licks, mountain streams, quail uplands, and the still reaches of inlet and marsh grounds, gray and cool in the early autumn dawn.

Condy and Blix got the attention of a clerk, and Condy explained.

"I want to go fishing—*we* want to go fishing. We want some place where we can go and come in the same day, and we want to catch fair-sized fish—no minnows."

The following half-hour was charming. Never was there a clerk more delightful. It would appear that his one object in life was that Condy and Blix should catch fish. The affairs of the nation stood still while he pon-

dered, suggested, advised, and deliberated. He told them where to go, how to get there, what train to take coming back, and who to ask for when they arrived. They would have to wait till Monday before going, but could return long before the fated hour of 7 P.M.

"Ask for Richardson," said the clerk; "and here, give him my card. He'll put you on to the good spots: some places are A-1 to-day, and to-morrow in the same place you can't kill a single fish."

Condy nudged Blix as the Mentor turned away to get his card.

"Notice that," he whispered: "*kill* a fish. You don't say 'catch', you say 'kill'—technical detail."

Then they bought their tackle: a couple of cheap reels, lines, leaders, sinkers, a book of assorted flies that the delightful clerk suggested, and a beautiful little tin box painted green, and stencilled with a gorgeous gold trout upon the lid, in which they were to keep the pint of salted shrimps to be used as bait in addition to the flies. Blix would get these shrimps at a little market near her home.

"But," said the clerk, "you got to get a permit to fish in that lake. Have you got a pull with the Water Company? Are you a stockholder?"

Condy's face fell, and Blix gave a little gasp of dismay. They looked at each other. Here was a check, indeed.

"Well," said the sublime being in shirt sleeves from behind the counter, "see what you can do; and if you can't make it, come back here an' lemmeno, and we'll fix you up in some other place. But Lake San Andreas has been bang-up this last week—been some great kills there; hope to the deuce you can make it."

Everything now hinged upon this permit. It was not until their expedition had been in doubt that Condy and Blix realized how alluring had been its prospects.

"Oh, I guess you can get a permit," said the clerk soothingly. "An' if you make any good kills, lemmeno and I'll put it in the paper. I'm the editor of the 'Sport-with-Gun-and-Rod' column in the *Press*," he added with a flush of pride.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, Blix, who was waiting at home, in great suspense, for that very purpose, received another telegram from Condyl:

Tension of situation relieved. Unconditional permission obtained. Don't forget the shrimps.

It had been understood that Condyl was to come to the flat on Sunday afternoon to talk over final arrangements with Blix. But as it was, Saturday evening saw him again at the Bessemers'.

He had been down at his club in the library, writing the last paragraphs of his diver's story, when, just as he finished, Sargeant discovered him.

"Why, Conny, old man, all alone here? Let's go downstairs and have a cigar. Hendricks and George Hands are coming around in half an hour. They told me not to let you get away."

Condyl stirred nervously in his chair. He knew what that meant. He had enough money in his pockets to play that night, and in an instant the enemy was all awake. The rowel was in his flank again, and the scourge at his back. Sargeant stood there, the well-groomed clubman of thirty; a little cynical perhaps, but a really good fellow for all that, and undeniably fond of Condyl. But somewhere with the eyes of some second self Condyl saw the girl of nineteen, part child and part woman; saw her goodness, her fine, sweet feminine strength as it were a dim radiance; "What's a good man worth, Condyl," she had said, "if he's not a strong man?"

"I suppose we'll have a game going before midnight,"

admitted Sargeant resignedly, smiling good-humouredly nevertheless.

Condy set his teeth. "I'll join you later. Wait a few moments," he said. He hurried to the office of the club, and sent a despatch to Blix—the third, since morning:

Can I come up right away? It's urgent. Send answer by this messenger.

He got his answer within three-quarters of an hour, and left the club as Hendricks and George Hands arrived by the elevator entrance.

Sitting in the bay window of the dining room, he told Blix why he had come.

"Oh, you were right!" she told him. "Always, *always* come, when—when you feel you must."

"It gets so bad sometimes, Blix," he confessed with abject self-contempt, "that when I can't get someone to play against, I'll sit down and deal dummy hands, and bet on them. Just the touch of the cards—just the *feel* of the chips. Faugh! it's shameful."

The day following, Sunday, Condy came to tea as usual; and after the meal, as soon as the family and Victorine had left the pair alone in the dining room, they set about preparing for their morrow's excursion. Blix put up their lunch—sandwiches of what Condy called "devilish" ham, hard-boiled eggs, stuffed olives, and a bottle of claret.

Condy took off his coat and made a great show of stringing the tackle: winding the lines from the spools on to the reels, and attaching the sinkers and flies to the leaders, smoking the while, and scowling fiercely. He got the lines fearfully and wonderfully snarled, he caught the hooks in the tablecloth, he lost the almost invisible gut leaders on the floor and looped the sinkers on the lines when they should have gone on the leaders. In the end, Blix had to help him out, disentangling the

lines foot by foot with a patience that seemed to Condylittle short of superhuman.

At nine o'clock she said decisively:

"Do you know what time we must get up in the morning if we are to have breakfast and get the seven-forty train? Quarter of six by the latest, and *you* must get up earlier than that, because you're at the hotel and have farther to go. Come here for breakfast, and—listen—be here by half-past six—are you *listening*, Condyl—and we'll go down to the depot from here. Don't forget to bring the rods."

"I'll wear my bicycle suit," he said, "and one of those golf scarfs that wrap around your neck."

"No," she declared, "I won't have it. Wear the oldest clothes you've got, but look fairly respectable, because we're to go to Luna's when we get back, remember. And now go home; you need all the sleep you can get if you are to get up at six o'clock."

Instead of being late, as Blix had feared, Condyl was absurdly ahead of time the next morning. For a wonder, he had not forgotten the rods; but he was one tremor of nervousness. He would eat no breakfast.

"We're going to miss that train," he would announce from time to time; "I just know it. Blix, look what time it is. We ought to be on the way to the depot now. Come on; you don't want any more coffee. Have you got everything? Did you put the reels in the lunch-basket?—and the fly-book? Lord, if we should forget the fly-book!"

He managed to get her to the depot over half an hour ahead of time. The train had not even backed in, nor the ticket office opened.

"I told you, Condyl, I told you," complained Blix, sinking helplessly upon a bench in the waiting room.

"No—no—no," he answered vaguely, looking nervously about, his head in the air. "We're none too soon

—have more time to rest now. I wonder what track the train leaves from. I wonder if it stops at San Bruno. I wonder how far it is from San Bruno to Lake San Andreas. I'm afraid it's going to rain. Heavens and earth, Blix, we forgot the shrimps!"

"No, *no!* Sit down, I've got the shrimps. Condyl, you make me so nervous I shall scream in a minute."

Some three quarters of an hour later the train had set them down at San Bruno—nothing more than a road-house, the headquarters for duck-shooters and fishermen from the city. However, Blix and Condyl were the only visitors. Everybody seemed to be especially nice to them on that wonderful morning. Even the supercilious ticket-seller at the San Francisco depot had unbent, and wished them good luck. The conductor of the train had shown himself affable. The very brakeman had gone out of his way to apprise them, quite five minutes ahead of time, that "the next stop was their place." And at San Bruno the proprietor of the road-house himself hitched up to drive them over to the lake, announcing that he would call for them at "Richardson's" in time for the evening train.

"And he only asked me four bits for both trips," whispered Condyl to Blix, as they jogged along.

The country was beautiful. It was hardly eight o'clock, and the morning still retained much of the brisk effervescence of the early dawn. Great, bare, rolling hills of gray-green, thinly scattered with live oak, bore back from the road on either hand. The sky was pale blue. There was a smell of cows in the air, and twice they heard an unseen lark singing. It was very still. The old buggy and complacent horse were embalmed in a pungent aroma of old leather and of stables that was entrancing; and a sweet smell of grass and sap came to them in occasional long whiffs. There was exhilaration in the very thought of being alive on

that odorous, still morning. The young blood went spanking in the veins. Blix's cheeks were ruddy, her little dark-brown eyes fairly coruscating with pleasure.

"Condy, isn't it all splendid!" she suddenly burst out.

"I feel regularly bigger," he declared solemnly. "I could do anything a morning like this."

Then they came to the lake, and to Richardson's, where the farmer lived who was also the custodian of the lake. The complacent horse jogged back, and Condy and Blix set about the serious business of the day. Condy had no need to show Richardson the delightful sporting clerk's card. The old Yankee—his twang and dry humour singularly incongruous on that royal morning—was solicitude itself. He picked out the best boat on the beach for them, loaned them his own anchor of railroad iron, indicated minutely the point on the opposite shore off which the last big trout had been "killed," and wetted himself to his ankles as he pushed off the boat.

Condy took the oars. Blix sat in the stern, jointing the rods and running the lines through the guides. She even baited the hooks with the salt shrimp, herself, and by nine o'clock they were at anchor some forty feet off-shore, and fishing, according to Richardson's advice, "a leetle mite off the edge o' the weeds."

"If we don't get a bite the whole blessed day," said Condy, as he paid out his line to the ratchet music of the reel, "we'll have fun, just the same. Look around— isn't this great?"

They were absolutely alone. The day was young as yet. The lake, smooth and still as gray silk, widened to the west and south without so much as a wrinkle to roughen the surface. Only to the east, where the sun looked over a shoulder of a higher hill, it flamed up into a blinding diamond iridescence. The surrounding

land lay between sky and water, hushed to a Sunday stillness. Far off across the lake by Richardson's they heard a dog bark, and the sound came fine and small and delicate. At long intervals the boat stirred with a gentle clap-clapping of the water along its sides. From the near-by shore in the growth of manzanita bushes quail called and clucked comfortably to each other; a bewildered yellow butterfly danced by over their heads, and slim blue dragon-flies came and poised on their lines and fishing-rods, bowing their backs.

From his seat in the bow, Condé cast a glance at Blix. She was holding her rod in both hands, absorbed, watchful, very intent. She was as trim as ever, even in the old clothes she had worn for the occasion. Her round, strong neck was as usual swathed high and tight in white, and the huge dog-collar girdled her waist according to her custom. She had taken off her hat. Her yellow hair rolled back from her round forehead and cool pink cheeks like a veritable nimbus, and for the fiftieth time Condé remarked the charming contrast of her small, deep-brown eyes in the midst of this white satin, yellow hair, white skin, and exquisite pink cheeks.

An hour passed. Then two.

"No fish," murmured Condé, drawing in his line to examine the bait. But, as he was fumbling with the flies he was startled by a sharp exclamation from Blix.

"Oh-Condé-I've-got-a-bite!"

He looked up just in time to see the tip of her rod twitch, twitch, twitch. Then the whole rod arched suddenly, the reel sang, the line tautened and cut diagonally through the water.

"You got him! you got him!" he shouted, palpitating with excitement. "And he's a good one!"

Blix rose, reeling in as rapidly as was possible, the

butt of the twitching, living rod braced against her belt. All at once the rod straightened out again, the strain was released, and the line began to slant rapidly away from the boat.

"He's off!" she cried.

"Off, nothing! *He's going to jump.* Look out for him, now!"

And then the two watching from the boat, tense and quivering with the drama of the moment, saw that most inspiring of sights—the "break" of a salmon-trout. Up he went, from a brusque explosion of ripples and foam—up into the gray of the morning from out the gray of the water: scales all gleaming, hackles all a-bristle; a sudden flash of silver, a sweep as of a scimitar in gray smoke, with a splash, a turmoil, an abrupt burst of troubled sound that stabbed through the silence of the morning, and in a single instant dissipated all the placid calm of the previous hours.

"Keep the line taut," whispered Condyl, gritting his teeth. "When he comes toward you, reel him in; an' if he pulls too hard, give him his head."

Blix was breathing fast, her cheeks blazing, her eyes all alight.

"Oh," she gasped, "I'm so afraid I'll lose him! Oh, look at that!" she cried, as the trout darted straight for the bottom, bending the rod till the tip was submerged. "Condyl, I'll lose him—I know I shall; you, *you* take the rod!"

"Not for a thousand dollars! Steady, there; he's away again! Oh, talk about *sport!*"

Yard by yard Blix reeled in until they began to see the silver glint of the trout's flanks through the green water. She brought him nearer. Swimming parallel with the boat, he was plainly visible from his wide-open mouth—the hook and fly protruding from his lower jaw—to the red, quivering flanges of the tail.

His sides were faintly speckled, his belly white as chalk. He was almost as long as Condyl's forearm.

"Oh, he's a beauty! Oh, *isn't* he a beauty!" murmured Condyl. "Now, careful, careful; bring him up to the boat where I can reach him; e-easy, Blix. If he bolts again, let him run."

Twice the trout shied from the boat's shadow, and twice, as Blix gave him his head, the reel sang and hummed like a watchman's rattle. But the third time he came to the surface and turned slowly on his side, the white belly and one red fin out of the water, the gills opening and shutting. He was tired out. A third time Blix drew him gently to the boat's side. Condyl reached out and down into the water till his very shoulder was wet, hooked two fingers under the distended gills, and with a long, easy movement of the arm swung him into the boat.

Their exultation was that of veritable children. Condyl whooped like an Apache, throwing his hat into the air; Blix was hardly articulate, her hands clasped, her hair in disarray, her eyes swimming with tears of sheer excitement. They shook each other's hands; they talked wildly at the same time; they pounded on the boat's thwarts with their fists; they laughed at their own absurdity; they looked at the trout again and again, guessed at his weight, and recalled to each other details of the struggle.

"When he broke that time, wasn't it grand?"

"And when I first felt him bite! It was so sudden—why, it actually frightened me. I never—no, never in my life!" exclaimed Blix, "was so happy as I am at this moment. Oh, Condyl, to think—just to *think!*"

"Isn't it glory hallelujah?"

"Isn't it better than teas, and dancing, and functions?"

"Blix—how old are we?"

"I don't care how old we are; I think that trout will weigh two pounds."

When they were calm again, they returned to their fishing. The morning passed, and it was noon before they were aware of it. By half-past twelve Blix had caught three trout, though the first was by far the heaviest. Condyl had not had so much as a bite. At one o'clock they rowed ashore and had lunch under a huge live oak in a little amphitheatre of manzanita.

Never had a lunch tasted so delicious. What if the wine was warm and the stuffed olives oily? What if the pepper for the hard-boiled eggs had sifted all over the "devilish" ham sandwiches? What if the eggs themselves had not been sufficiently cooked, and the corkscrew forgotten? They *could* not be anything else but inordinately happy, sublimely gay. Nothing short of actual tragedy could have marred the joy of that day.

But after they were done eating, and Blix had put away the forks and spoons, and while Condyl was stretched upon his back smoking a cigar, she said to him:

"Now, Condyl, what do you say to a little game of cards with me?"

The cigar dropped from Condyl's lips, and he sat suddenly upright, brushing the fallen leaves from his hair. Blix had taken a deck of cards from the lunch-basket, and four rolls of chips wrapped in tissue paper. He stared at her in speechless amazement.

"What do you say?" she repeated, looking at him and smiling.

"Why, Blix!" he exclaimed in amazement, "what do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I want you to play cards with me."

"I'll not do it," he declared, almost coldly.

"Listen to me, Condyl," answered Blix; and for quite five minutes, while he interrupted and protested

and pshawed and argued, she talked to him calmly and quietly.

"I don't ask you to stop playing, Condyl," she said, as she finished; "I just ask you that when you feel you must play—or—I mean, when you want to very bad, you will come and play with *me*, instead of playing at your club."

"But it's absurd, it's preposterous. I hate to see a girl gambling—and you of all girls!"

"It's no worse for me than it is for you and—well, do you suppose I would play with anyone else? Maybe you think I can't play well enough to make it interesting for you," she said gaily. "Is that it? I can soon show you, Condyl Rivers—never mind when I learned how."

"But, Blix, you don't know how often we play, those men and I. Why, it is almost every—you don't know how often we play."

"Condyl, whenever you want to play, and will play with *me*, no matter what I've got in hand, I'll stop everything and play with you."

"But why?"

"Because I think, Condyl, that *this* way perhaps you won't play quite so often at first; and then little by little perhaps—perhaps—well, never mind that now. I want to play; put it that way. But I want you to promise me never to play with anyone else—say for six months."

And in the end, whipped by a sense of shame, Condyl made her the promise. They became very gay upon the instant.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Condyl; "what do *you* know of poker? I think we had best play old sledge or cassino."

Blix had dealt a hand and partitioned the chips.

"Straights and flushes *before* the draw," she announced calmly.

Condy started and stared. Then looking at her askance, picked up his hand.

"It's up to you."

"I'll make it five to play."

"Five? Very well. How many cards?"

"Three."

"I'll take two."

"Bet you five more."

Blix looked at her hand. Then, without trace of expression in her voice or face, said:

"There's your five, and I'll raise you five."

"Five better."

"And five better than that."

"Call you."

"Full house. Aces on tens," said Blix, throwing down her cards.

"Heavens! they're good as gold," muttered Condý as Blix gathered in the chips.

An hour later she had won all the chips but five.

"Now we'll stop and get to fishing again; don't you want to?"

He agreed, and she counted the chips.

"Condy, you owe me seven dollars and a half," she announced.

Condy began to smile. "Well," he said jocosely, "I'll send you around a check to-morrow."

But at this Blix was cross upon the instant. "You wouldn't do that—wouldn't talk that way with one of your friends at the club!" she exclaimed; "and it's not right to do it with me. Condy, give me seven dollars and a half. When you play cards with me it's just as though it were with another man. I would have paid you if *you* had won."

"But I haven't got more than nine dollars. Who'll pay for the supper to-night at Luna's, and our railroad fare, going home?"

"I'll pay."

"But I—I can't afford to lose money this way."

"Shouldn't have played then; I took the same chances as you. Condyl, I want my money."

"You—you—why, you've regularly flimflammed me."

"Will you give me my money?"

"Oh, take your money then!"

Blix shut the money in her purse, and rose, dusting her dress.

"Now," she said, "now that the pastime of card-playing is over, we will return to the serious business of life, which is the catching—no, *killing* of lake trout."

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Condyl pulled up the anchor of railroad iron and rowed back to Richardson's. Blix had six trout to her credit, but Condyl's ill-luck had been actually ludicrous.

"I can hold a string in the water as long as anybody," he complained, "but I'd like to have the satisfaction of merely changing the bait *occasionally*. I've not had a single bite—not a nibble, y'know, all day. Never mind, you got the big trout, Blix; that first one. That five minutes was worth the whole day. It's been glorious, the whole thing. We'll come down here once a week right along now."

But the one incident that completed the happiness of that wonderful day occurred just as they were getting out of the boat on the shore by Richardson's. In a mud-hole between two rocks they discovered a tiny striped snake, hardly bigger than a lead-pencil, in the act of swallowing a little green frog, and they passed a rapt ten minutes in witnessing the progress of this miniature drama, which culminated happily in the victim's escape, and triumph of virtue.

"That," declared Blix as they climbed into the old buggy which was to take them to the train, "was the one thing necessary. That made the day perfect."

B L I X

They reached the city at dusk, and sent their fish, lunch-basket, and rods up to the Bessemers' flat by a messenger boy with an explanatory note for Blix's father.

"Now," said Condry, "for Luna's and the matrimonial objects."

CHAPTER VII

LUNA'S Mexican restaurant has no address. It is on no particular street, at no particular corner; even its habitués, its most enthusiastic devotees, are unable to locate it upon demand. It is "over there in the quarter," "not far from the cathedral there." One could find it if one started out with that intent; but to direct another there—no, that is out of the question. It *can* be reached by following the alleys of Chinatown. You will come out of the last alley—the one where the slave girls are—upon the edge of the Mexican quarter, and by going straight forward a block or two, and by keeping a sharp lookout to right and left you will hit upon it. It is always to be searched for. Always to be discovered.

On that particular Monday evening Blix and Condyl arrived at Luna's some fifteen minutes before seven. Condyl had lost himself and all sense of direction in the strange streets of the quarter, and they were on the very brink of despair when Blix discovered the sign upon an opposite corner.

As Condyl had foretold, they had the place to themselves. They went into the back room with its one mirror, six tables, and astonishing curtains of Nottingham lace; and the waiter, whose name was Richard or Riccardo, according to taste, began to officiate at the solemn rites of the "supper Mexican." Condyl and Blix ate with their eyes continually wandering to the door; and as the *frijoles* were being served, started simultaneously and exchanged glances.

A man wearing two marguerites in the lapel of his coat had entered abruptly, and sat down to a table close at hand.

Condy drew a breath of suppressed excitement.

"There he is," he whispered—"Captain Jack!"

They looked at the newcomer with furtive anxiety, and told themselves that they were disappointed. For a retired sea captain he was desperately commonplace. His hair was red, he was younger than they had expected, and, worst of all, he did look tough.

"Oh, poor K. D. B.!" sighed Blix, shaking her head. "He'll never do, I'm afraid. Perhaps he has a good heart, though; red-headed people are *sometimes* affectionate."

"They are impulsive," hazarded Condy.

As he spoke the words, a second man entered the little room. He, too, sat down at a near-by table. He, too, ordered the "supper Mexican." He, too, wore marguerites in his buttonhole.

"Death and destruction!" gasped Condy, turning pale.

Blix collapsed helplessly in her chair, her hands dropping in her lap. They stared at each other in utter confusion.

"Here's a how-do-you-do," murmured Condy, pretending to strip a *tamale* that Richard had just set before him. But Blix had pushed hers aside.

"What does it mean?" whispered Condy across the table. "In Heaven's name, what does it mean?"

"It can only mean one thing," Blix declared; "one of them is the captain, and one is a coincidence. Anybody might wear a marguerite; we ought to have thought of that."

"But which is which?"

"If K. D. B. should come now!"

"But the last man looks more like the captain."

The last man was a sturdy, broad-shouldered fellow, who might have been forty. His heavy moustache was just touched with gray, and he did have a certain

vaguely "sober and industrious" appearance. But the difference between the two men was slight, after all; the red-headed man could easily have been a sea captain, and he certainly was over thirty-five.

"Which? which? which?—how can we tell? We might think of some way to get rid of the coincidence, if we could only tell which the coincidence was. We owe it to K. D. B. In a way, Condyl, it's our duty. We brought her here, or we are going to, and we ought to help her all we can; and she may be here at any moment. What time is it now?"

"Five minutes after seven. But, Blix, I should think the right one—the captain—would be all put out himself by seeing another chap here wearing marguerites. Does either one of 'em seem put out to you? Look. I should think the captain, whichever one he is, would kind of *glare* at the coincidence."

Stealthily they studied the two men for a moment.

"No, no," murmured Blix, "you can't tell. Neither of them seems to glare much. Oh, Condyl"—her voice dropped to a faint whisper. "The red-headed one has put his hat on a chair, just behind him, notice? Do you suppose if you stood up you could see inside?"

"What good would that do?"

"He might have his initials inside the crown, or his whole name even; and you could see if he had a 'captain' before it."

Condyl made a pretence of rising to get a match in a ribbed, truncated cone of china that stood upon an adjacent table, and Blix held her breath as he glanced down into the depths of the hat. He resumed his seat.

"Only initials," he breathed—"W. J. A. It might be Jack, that J., and it might be Joe, or Jeremiah, or Joshua; and even if he was a captain he might not use the title. We're no better off than we were before."

"And K. D. B. may come at any moment. Maybe she

has come already and looked through the windows, and saw *two* men with marguerites and went away. She'd be just that timid. What can we do?"

"Wait a minute, look here," murmured Condyl. "I've an idea. I'll find out which the captain is. You see that picture, that chromo, on the wall opposite?"

Blix looked as he indicated. The picture was a gorgeously coloured lithograph of a pilot-boat, schooner-rigged, all sails set, dashing bravely through seas of emerald-green colour.

"You mean that schooner?" asked Blix.

"That schooner, exactly. Now listen. You ask me in a loud voice what kind of a boat that is; and when I answer, you keep your eye on the two men."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"You'll see. Try it now; we've no time to lose."

Blix shifted in her seat and cleared her throat. Then:

"What a pretty boat that is up there, that picture on the wall. See over there, on the wall opposite? Do you notice it? Isn't she pretty? Condyl, tell me what kind of a boat is that?"

Condyl turned about in his place with great deliberation, fixed the picture with a judicial eye, and announced decisively:

"That?—why, that's a *barkentine*."

Condyl had no need to wait for Blix's report. The demonstration came far too quickly for that. The red-headed man at his loud declaration merely glanced in the direction of the chromo and returned to his *enchellados*. But he of the black moustache followed Condyl's glance, noted the picture of which he spoke, and snorted contemptuously. They even heard him mutter beneath his moustache:

"*Barkentine* your eye!"

"No doubt as to which is the captain now," whis-

pered Condyl so soon as the other had removed from him a glance of withering scorn.

They could hardly restrain their gaiety; but their gravity promptly returned when Blix kicked Condyl's foot under the table and murmured: "He's looking at his watch, the captain is. K. D. B. isn't here yet, and the red-headed man, the coincidence, is. We *must* get rid of him. Condyl, can't you think of something?"

"Well, he won't go till he's through his supper, you can depend upon that. If he's here when K. D. B. arrives, it will spoil everything. She wouldn't stay a moment. She wouldn't even come in."

"Isn't it disappointing? And I had so counted upon bringing these two together! And Captain Jack *is* a nice man!"

"You can see that with one hand tied behind you," whispered Condyl. "The other chap's tough."

"Looks just like the kind of man to get into jail sooner or later."

"Maybe he's into some mischief now; you never can tell. And the Mexican quarter of San Francisco is just the place for 'affairs.' I'll warrant he's got *pals*."

"Well, here he is—that's the main point—just keeping those people apart, spoiling a whole romance. Maybe ruining their lives. It's *quite* possible; really it is. Just stop and think. This is a positive crisis we're looking at now."

"Can't we get rid of him *somehow*?"

"O-oh!" whispered Blix, all at once, in a quiver of excitement. "There *is* a way, if we'd ever have the courage to do it. It might work; and if it didn't, he'd never know the difference, never would suspect us. Oh! but we wouldn't dare."

"What? what? In Heaven's name what is it, Blix?"

"We wouldn't dare—we couldn't. Oh! but it would be such——"

"K. D. B. may come in that door at any second."

"I'm half afraid, but all the same—— Condyl, let me have a pencil." She dashed off a couple of lines on the back of the bill of fare, and her hand trembled like a leaf as she handed him what she had written.

"Send him—the red-readed man—that telegram. There's an office just two doors below here, next the drug-store. I saw it as we came by. You know his initials; remember, you saw them in his hat. W. J. A., Luna's restaurant. That's all you want."

"Lord," muttered Condyl, as he gazed upon what Blix had written.

"Do you dare?" she whispered, with a little hysterical shudder.

"If it failed we've nothing to lose."

"And K. D. B. is coming nearer every instant!"

"But would he go—that is, at once?"

"We can only try. You won't be gone a hundred seconds. You can leave me here that length of time. Quick, Condyl; decide one way or the other. It's getting desperate."

Condyl reached for his hat.

"Give me some money, then," he said. "You won all of mine."

A few moments later he was back again; and the two sat, pretending to eat their chili peppers, their hearts in their throats, hardly daring to raise their eyes from their plates. Condyl was actually sick with excitement, and all but tipped the seltzer bottle to the floor when a messenger boy appeared in the outer room. The boy and the proprietor held a conference over the counter. Then Richard appeared between the portières of Nottingham lace, the telegram in his hand and the boy at his heels.

Evidently Richard knew the red-headed man, for he crossed over to him at once with the words:

"I guess this is for you, Mr. Atkins?"

He handed him the despatch and retired. The red-headed man signed the receipt; the boy departed. Blix and Condry heard the sound of torn paper as the red-headed man opened the telegram.

Ten seconds passed, then fifteen, then twenty. There was a silence. Condry dared to steal a glance at the red-headed man's reflection in the mirror. He was studying the despatch, frowning horribly. He put it away in his pocket, took it out again with a fierce movement of impatience, and consulted it a second time. His "supper Mexican" remained untasted before him; Condry and Blix heard him breathing loud through his nose. That he was profoundly agitated, they could not doubt for a single moment. All at once a little panic terror seemed to take possession of him. He rose, seized his hat, jammed it over his ears, slapped a half-dollar upon the table, and strode from the restaurant.

This is what the red-headed man had read in the despatch; this is what Blix had written:

All is discovered. Fly at once.

And never in all their subsequent rambles about the city did Blix or Condry set eyes upon the red-headed man again, nor did Luna's restaurant, where he seemed to have been a habitu  , ever afterward know his presence. He disappeared; he was swallowed up. He had left the restaurant, true. Had he also left that neighbourhood? Had he fled the city, the State, the country even? What skeleton in the red-headed man's closet had those six words called to life and the light of day? Had they frightened him forth to spend the rest of his days fleeing from an unnamed, unknown avenger—a veritable wandering Jew? What mystery had they touched upon there in the bald, bare back room of the Quarter's restaurant? What dark door had they opened,

what red-headed phantom had they evoked? Had they broken up a plot, thwarted a conspiracy, prevented a crime? They never knew. One thing only was certain. The red-headed man had had a past.

Meanwhile the minutes were passing, and K. D. B. still failed to appear. Captain Jack was visibly growing impatient, anxious. By now he had come to the fiery liqueur called *mescal*. He was nearly through his supper. At every moment he consulted his watch and fixed the outside door with a scowl. It was already twenty minutes after seven.

"I know the red-headed man spoiled it, after all," murmured Blix. "K. D. B. saw the two of them in here and was frightened."

"We could send Captain Jack a telegram from her," suggested Condly. "I'm ready for anything now."

"What could you say?"

"Oh, that she couldn't come. Make another appointment."

"He'd be offended with her. He'd never make another appointment. Sea captains are always so punctilious, y' know."

Richard brought them their coffee and kirsch, and Condly showed Blix how to burn a lump of sugar and sweeten the coffee with syrup. But they were disappointed. Captain Jack was getting ready to leave. K. D. B. had evidently broken the appointment.

Then all at once she appeared.

They knew it upon the instant by a brisk opening and shutting of the street door, and by a sudden alertness on the part of Captain Jack, which he immediately followed by a quite inexplicable move. The street door in the outside room had hardly closed before his hand shot to his coat lapel and tore out the two marguerites.

The action was instinctive; Blix knew it for such immediately. The retired captain had not premeditated

it. He had not seen the face of the newcomer. She had not time to come into the back room, or even to close the street door. But the instant that the captain had recognized a bunch of white marguerites in her belt he had, without knowing why, been moved to conceal his identity.

"He's afraid," whispered Blix. "Positively, I believe he's afraid. How absolutely stupid men are!"

But meanwhile, K. D. B., the looked-for, the planned-for and intrigued-for; the object of so much diplomacy, such delicate manœuvring; the pivot upon which all plans were to turn, the storm-centre round which so many conflicting currents revolved, and for whose benefit the peace of mind of the red-headed man had been forever broken up—had entered the room.

"Why, she's *pretty!*" was Blix's first smothered exclamation, as if she had expected a harridan.

K. D. B. looked like a servant-girl of the better sort, and was really very neatly dressed. She was small, little even. She had snappy black eyes, a resolute mouth, and a general air of being very quiet, very matter-of-fact and complacent. She would be disturbed at nothing, excited at nothing; Blix was sure of that. She was placid, but it was the placidity not of the absence of emotion, but of emotion disdained. Not the placidity of the mollusk, but that of a mature and contemplative cat.

Quietly she sat down at a corner table, quietly she removed her veil and gloves, and quietly she took in the room and its three occupants.

Condy and Blix glued their eyes upon their coffee cups like guilty conspirators; but a crash of falling crockery called their attention to the captain's table.

Captain Jack was in a tremor. Hitherto he had acted the rôle of a sane and sensible gentleman of middle age, master of himself and of the situation. The entrance of K. D. B. had evidently reduced him to a semi-idiotic

condition. He enlarged himself; he eased his neck in his collar with a rotary movement of head and shoulders. He frowned terribly at trifling objects in corners of the room. He cleared his throat till the glassware jingled. He pulled at his moustache. He perspired, fumed, fretted, and was suddenly seized with an insane desire to laugh. Once only he caught the eye of K. D. B., calmly sitting in her corner picking daintily at her fish, whereupon he immediately overturned the vinegar and pepper casters upon the floor. Just so might have behaved an overgrown puppy in the presence of a sleepy, unperturbed chessy-cat, dozing by the fire.

"He ought to be shaken," murmured Blix at the end of her patience. "Does he think *she* is going to make the first move?"

"Ha, ah'm!" thundered the captain, clearing his throat for the twentieth time, twirling his moustache, and burying his scarlet face in an enormous pocket handkerchief.

Five minutes passed and he was still in his place. From time to time K. D. B. fixed him with a quiet, deliberate look, and resumed her delicate picking.

"Do you think she knows it's he, now that he's taken off his marguerites?" whispered Condyl.

"Know it?—of course she does! Do you think women are absolutely *blind*, or so imbecile as men are? And, then, if she didn't think it was he, she'd go away. And she's so really pretty, too. He ought to thank his stars alive. Think what a fright she might have been! She doesn't *look* thirty-one."

"Huh!" returned Condyl. "As long as she *said* she was thirty-one you can bet everything you have that she *is*; that's as true as revealed religion."

"Well, it's something to have seen the kind of people who write the personals," said Blix. "I had always imagined that they were kind of tough."

"You see they are not," he answered. "I told you they were not. Maybe, however, we have been exceptionally fortunate. At any rate, these are respectable enough."

"Not the least doubt about that. But why won't he do something, that captain?" mourned Blix. "Why *will* he act like such a ninny?"

"He's waiting for us to go," said Condý; "I'm sure of it. They'll never meet so long as we're here. Let's go and give 'em a chance. If you leave the two alone here, one or the other will *have* to speak. The suspense would become too terrible. It would be as though they were on a desert island."

"But I wanted to *see* them meet," she protested.

"You wouldn't hear what they said."

"But we'd never know if they did meet, and oh—and *who* spoke first."

"She'll speak first," declared Condý.

"Never!" returned Blix, in an indignant whisper.

"I tell you what. We could go and then come back in five minutes. I'll forget my stick here. Savvy?"

"You would probably do it anyhow," she told him.

They decided this would be the better course. They got together their things, and Condý neglected his stick, hanging upon a hook on the wall.

At the counter in the outside room, Blix, to the stupefaction of Richard, the waiter, paid the bill. But as she was moving toward the door, Condý called her back.

"Remember the waiter," he said severely, while Richard grinned and bobbed. "Fifty cents is the very least you could tip him." Richard actually protested, but Condý was firm, and insisted upon a half-dollar tip.

"*Noblesse oblige*," he declared with vast solemnity.

They walked as far as the cathedral, listened for a moment to the bell striking the hour of eight; then as

they remembered that the restaurant closed at that time, hurried back and entered the outside room in feigned perturbation.

"Did I, could I possibly have left my stick here!" exclaimed Condyl to Richard, who was untying his apron behind the counter. But Richard had not noticed.

"I think I must have left it back here where we were sitting."

Condyl stepped into the back room, Blix following. They got his stick and returned to the outside room.

"Yes, yes, I did leave it," he said, as he showed it to Richard. "I'm always leaving that stick wherever I go."

"Come again," said Richard, as he bowed them out of the door.

On the curb outside Condyl and Blix shook hands and congratulated each other on the success of all their labours. In the back room, seated at the same table, a bunch of wilting marguerites between them, they had seen their "matrimonial objects" conferring earnestly together, absorbed in the business of getting acquainted.

Blix heaved a great sigh of relief and satisfaction, exclaiming:

"At last K. D. B. and Captain Jack have met!"

CHAPTER VIII

BUT," she added, as they started to walk, "we will never know which one spoke first."

But Condyl was already worrying.

"I don't know, I don't know," he murmured anxiously. "Perhaps we've done an awful thing. Suppose they aren't happy together after they're married? I wish we hadn't; I wish we hadn't now. We've been playing a game of checkers with human souls. We've an awful responsibility. Suppose he kills her some time?"

"Fiddlesticks, Condyl! And, besides, if we've done wrong with our matrimonial objects, we've offset it by doing well with our red-headed coincidence. How do you know, you may have 'foiled a villain' with that telegram—prevented a crime?"

Condyl grinned at the recollection of the incident.

"Fly at once," he repeated. "I guess he's flying yet. 'All is discovered.' I'd give a dollar and a half——"

"If you had it?"

"Oh, well, if I had it, to know just what it was we have discovered."

Suddenly Blix caught his arm.

"Condyl, here they come!"

"Who? Who?"

"Our objects, Captain Jack and K. D. B."

"Of course, of course. They couldn't stay. The restaurant shuts up at eight."

Blix and Condyl had been walking slowly in the direction of Pacific Street, and K. D. B. and her escort

soon overtook them going in the same direction. As they passed, the captain was saying:

"—jumped on my hatches, and says we'll make it an international affair. That didn't——"

A passing wagon drowned the sound of his voice.

"He was telling her of his adventures!" cried Blix. "Splendid! Othello and Desdemona. They're getting on."

"Let's follow them!" exclaimed Condly.

"Should we? Wouldn't it be—indiscreet?"

"No. We are the arbiters of their fate; we *must* take an interest."

They allowed their objects to get ahead some half a block and then fell in behind. There was little danger of their being detected. The captain and K. D. B. were absorbed in each other. She had even taken his arm.

"They make a fine-looking couple, really," said Blix. "Where do you suppose they are going? To another restaurant?"

But this was not the case. Blix and Condly followed them as far as Washington Square, where the Geodetic Survey stone stands, and the enormous flagstaff; and there in front of a commonplace little house, two doors above the Russian church with its minarets like inverted balloons, K. D. B. and the captain halted. For a few moments they conversed in low tones at the gate, then said good-night, K. D. B. entering the house, the captain bowing with great deference, his hat in his hand. Then he turned about, glanced once or twice at the house, set his hat at an angle, and disappeared across the square, whistling a tune, his chin in the air.

"Very good, excellent, highly respectable," approved Blix; and Condly himself fetched a sigh of relief.

"Yes, yes, it might have been worse."

"We'll never see them again, our 'Matrimonial Objects,'" said Blix, "and they'll never know about us;

but we have brought them together. We've started a romance. Yes, I think we've done a good day's work. And now, Condyl, I think we had best be thinking of home ourselves. I'm just beginning to get most awfully sleepy. What a day we've had!"

A sea fog, or rather *the* sea fog—San Francisco's old and inseparable companion—had gathered by the time they reached the top of the Washington Street hill. Everything was wet with it. The asphalt was like varnished ebony. Indistinct masses and huge dim shadows stood for the houses on either side. From the eucalyptus trees and the palms the water dripped like rain. Far off, oceanward, the fog-horn was lowing like a lost gigantic bull. The gray bulk of a policeman—the light from the street lamp reflected in his star—loomed up on the corner as they descended from the car.

Condyl had intended to call his diver's story "A Submarine Romance," but Blix had disapproved.

"It's too 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,'" she had said. "You want something much more dignified. There's that about you, Condyl, you like to be too showy; you don't know when to stop. But you have left off red-and-white scarfs, and I am very glad to see you wearing white shirt-fronts instead of pink ones."

"Yes, yes, I thought it would be quieter," he had answered, as though the idea had come from him. Blix allowed him to think so.

But "A Victory Over Death," as the story was finally called, was a success. Condyl was too much of a born story-teller not to know when he had done something distinctly good. When the story came back from the typewriter's, with the additional strength that print lends to fiction, and he had read it over, he could not repress a sense of jubilation. The story rang true.

"Bully, bully!" he muttered between his teeth as he finished the last paragraph. "It's a corker! If it's rejected everywhere, it's an out-of-sight yarn just the same."

And there Condyl's enthusiasm in the matter began to dwindle. The fine fire which had sustained him during the story's composition had died out. He was satisfied with his work. He had written a good story, and that was the end of it. No doubt he would send it East—to the Centennial Company—to-morrow or the day after—some time that week. To mail the manuscript meant quite half an hour's effort. He would have to buy stamps for return postage; a letter would have to be written, a large envelope procured, the accurate address ascertained. For the moment his supplement work demanded his attention. He put off sending the story from day to day. His interest in it abated. And for the matter he soon discovered he had other things to think of.

It had been easy to promise Blix that he would no longer gamble at his club with the other men of his acquaintance; but it was "death and the devil," as he told himself, to abide by that promise. More than once in the fortnight following upon his resolution he had come up to the little flat on the Washington Street hill as to a place of refuge; and Blix, always pretending that it was all a huge joke and part of their good times, had brought out the cards and played with him. But she knew very well the fight he was making against the enemy, and how hard it was for him to keep from the round green tables and group of silent shirt-sleeved men in the card-rooms of his club. She looked forward to the time when Condyl would cease to play even with her. But she was too sensible and practical a girl to expect him to break a habit of years' standing in a couple of weeks. The thing would have to be accomplished little by little. At times she had misgivings as

to the honesty of the course she had adopted. But nowadays, playing as he did with her only, Condyl gambled but two or three evenings in the week, and then not for more than two hours at a time. Heretofore hardly an evening that had not seen him at the round table in his club's card-room, whence he had not risen until long after midnight.

Condyl had told young Sargeant that he had "reformed" in the matter of gambling, and intended to swear off for a few months. Sargeant, like the thoroughbred he was, never urged to play after that, and never spoke of the previous night's game when Condyl was about. The other men of his "set" were no less thoughtful, and, though they rallied him a little at first upon his defection, soon let the matter drop. Condyl told himself that there were plenty of good people in the world, after all. Everyone seemed conspiring to make it easy for him, and he swore at himself for a weak-kneed cad.

On a certain Tuesday, about a week after the fishing excursion and the affair of the "Matrimonial Objects," toward half-past six in the evening, Condyl was in his room, dressing for a dinner engagement. Young Sargeant's sister had invited him to be one of a party who were to dine at the University Club and later on fill a box at a charity play, given by amateurs at one of the downtown theatres. But as he was washing his linen shirt-studs with his tooth-brush, his eye fell upon a note, in Laurie Flagg's handwriting, that lay on his writing-desk, and that he had received some ten days previous. Condyl turned cold upon the instant, hurled the tooth-brush across the room, and dropped into a chair with a groan of despair. Miss Flagg was giving a theatre party for the same affair, and he remembered now that he had promised to join her party as well, forgetting all about the engagement he had made with

Miss Sargeant. It was impossible at this late hour to accept either one of the young women's invitations without offending the other.

"Well, I won't go to *either*, that's all," he vociferated aloud to the opposite wall. "I'll send 'em each a wire, and say that I'm sick or have got to go down to the office, and—and, by George! I'll go up and see Blix, and we'll read and make things to eat."

And no sooner had this alternative occurred to him than it appeared too fascinating to be resisted. A weight seemed removed from his mind. When it came to that, what amusement would he have at either affair?

"Sit up there with your shirt-front starched like a board," he blustered, "and your collar throttling you, and smile till your face is sore, and reel off small talk to a girl whose last name you can't remember! Do I have any fun, does it do me any good, do I get ideas for yarns! What do I do it for? I don't know."

While speaking he had been kicking off his tight shoes and such of his full dress as he had already put on, and with a feeling of enormous relief turned again to his sack suit of tweed. "Lord, these feel better!" he exclaimed, as he substituted the loose business suit for the formal rigidity of his evening dress. It was with a sensation of positive luxury that he put on a "soft" shirt of blue cheviot and his tan walking-shoes.

"But no more red scarfs," he declared, as he knotted his black satin "club" before the mirror. "She *was* right there." He put his cigarettes in his pocket, caught up his gloves and stick, clapped on his hat, and started for the Bessemers' flat with a feeling of joyous expectancy he had not known for days.

Evidently Blix had seen him coming, for she opened the door herself; and it suited her humour for the moment to treat him as a peddler or book-agent.

"No, no," she said airily, her head in the air as she held the door. "No, we don't want any to-day. We *have* the biography of Abraham Lincoln. Don't want to subscribe to any Home Book of Art. We're not artistic; we use drapes in our parlours. Don't want 'The Wives and Mothers of Great Men.'"

But Condyl had noticed a couple of young women on the lower steps of the adjacent flat, quite within ear-shot, and at once he began in a loud, harsh voice:

"Well, y' know, we can't wait for our rent forever; I'm only the collector, and I've nothing to do with repairs. Pay your rent that's three months overdue, and then——"

But Blix pulled him within the house and clapped to the door.

"Condyl *Rivers!*" she exclaimed, her cheeks flaming, "those are our neighbours. They heard every word. What *do* you suppose they think?"

"Huh! I'd rather have 'em think I was a rent-collector than a book-agent. *You* began it. 'Evenin', Miss Lady."

"'Evenin', Mister Man."

But Condyl's visit, begun thus gaily, soon developed along much more serious lines. After supper, while the light still lasted, Blix read stories to him while he smoked cigarettes in the bay window of the dining room. But as soon as the light began to go she put the book aside, and the two took their accustomed places in the window, and watched the evening burning itself out over the Golden Gate.

It was just warm enough to have one of the windows opened, and for a long time after the dusk they sat listening to the vague clamour of the city, lapsing by degrees, till it settled into a measured, soothing murmur, like the breathing of some vast monster asleep. Condyl's cigarette was a mere red point in the half-darkness.

The smoke drifted out of the open window in long blue strata. At his elbow Blix was leaning forward, looking down upon the darkening, drowsing city, her round, strong chin propped upon her hand. She was just close enough for Condyl to catch the sweet, delicious feminine perfume that came indefinitely from her clothes, her hair, her neck. From where Condyl sat he could see the silhouette of her head and shoulders against the dull golden blur of the open window; her round, high forehead, with the thick yellow hair rolling back from her temples and ears, her pink clean cheeks, her little dark-brown, scintillating eyes, and her firm red mouth, made all the firmer by the position of her chin upon her hand. As ever, her round, strong neck was swathed high and tight in white satin; but between the topmost fold of the satin and the rose of one small ear-lobe was a little triangle of white skin, that was partly her neck and partly her cheek, and that Condyl knew should be softer than down, smoother than satin, warm and sweet and redolent as new apples. Condyl imagined himself having the right to lean toward her there and kiss that little spot upon her neck or her cheek; and as he fancied it, was surprised to find his breath come suddenly quick, and a barely perceptible qualm, as of a certain faintness, thrill him to his finger-tips; and then, he thought, how would it be if he could, without fear of rebuff, reach out his arm and put it about her trim, firm waist, and draw her very close to him, till he should feel the satiny coolness of her smooth cheek against his; till he could sink his face in the delicious, fragrant confusion of her hair, then turn that face to his—that face with its strong, calm mouth and sweet, full lips—the face of this dear young girl of nineteen, and then——

“I say—I—shall we—let’s read again. Let’s—let’s do something.”

“Condyl, how you frightened me!” exclaimed Blix,

with a great start. "No, listen: I want to talk to you, to tell you something. Papum and I have been having some very long and serious talks since you were last here. What do you think, I may go away."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Condyl, sitting suddenly upright. "Where to, in Heaven's name?" he added, "and when? and what for?"

"To New York, to study medicine."

There was a silence; then Condyl exclaimed, waving his hands at her:

"Oh, go right on! Don't mind me. Little thing like going to New York—to study medicine. Of course, that happens every day, a mere detail. I presume you'll go back and forth for your meals?"

Then Blix began to explain. It appeared that she had two aunts, both sisters of her father—one a widow, the other unmarried. The widow, a certain Mrs. Kihm, lived in New York, and was wealthy, and had views on "women's sphere of usefulness." The other, Miss Bessemer, a little old maid of fifty, Condyl had on rare occasions seen at the flat, where everyone called her Aunt Dodd. She lived in that vague region of the city known as the Mission, where she owned a little property.

From what Blix told him that evening Condyl learned that Mrs. Kihm had visited the coast a few winters previous and had taken a great fancy to Blix. Even then she had proposed to Mr. Bessemer to take Blix back to New York with her, and educate her to some woman's profession; but at that time the old man would not listen to it. Now it seemed that the opportunity had again presented itself.

"She's a dear old lady," Blix said; "not a bit strong-minded, as you would think, and ever so much cleverer than most men. She manages all her property herself. For the last month she's been writing again to Papum

for me to come on and stay with her three or four years. She hasn't a chick nor a child, and she don't entertain or go out any, so maybe she feels lonesome. Of course if I studied there, Papum wouldn't think of Aunt Kihm—don't you know—paying for it at all. I wouldn't go if it was that way. But I could stay with her and she could make a home for me while I was there—if I should study—anything—study medicine."

"But why!" he exclaimed. "What do you want to study to be a doctor for? It isn't as though you had to support yourself."

"I know, I know I've not got to support myself. But why shouldn't I have a profession just like a man—just like you, Condyl? You stop and think. It seemed strange to me when I first thought of it; but I got thinking about it and talking it over with Papum, and I should *love* it. I'd do it, not because I would have to do it, but because it would interest me. Condyl, you know that I'm not a bit strong-minded, and that I hate a masculine, unfeminine girl as much as you do."

"But a medical college, Blix! You don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I do. There's a college in New York just for women. Aunt Kihm sent me the prospectus, and it's one of the best in the country. I don't dream of practising, you know; at least, I don't think about that now. But one must have some occupation; and isn't studying medicine, Condyl, better than piano-playing, or French courses, or literary classes and Browning circles? Oh, I've no patience with that kind of girl! And look at the chance I have now; and Aunt Kihm is such a dear! Think, she writes, I could go to and from the college in her coupé every day, and I would see New York; and just being in a big city like that is an education."

"You're right, it would be a big thing for you," assented Condyl, "and I like the idea of *you* studying

something. It would be the making of such a girl as you, Blix."

And then Blix, seeing him thus acquiescent, said:

"Well, it's all settled; Papum and I both wrote last night."

"When are you going?"

"The first week in January."

"Well, that's not so *awfully* soon. But who will take your place here? However in the world would your father get along without you, and Snooky and Howard?"

"Aunt Dodd is going to come."

"Sudden enough," said Condyl, "but it *is* a great thing for you, Blix, and I'm mighty glad for you. Your future is all cut out for you now. Of course your aunt, if she's so fond of you and hasn't any children, will leave you everything—maybe settle something on you right away; and you'll marry some one of those New York chaps, and be great big people before you know it."

"The idea, Condyl!" she protested. "No; I'm going there to study medicine. Oh, you don't know how enthusiastic I am over the idea! I've bought some of the first-year books already, and have been reading them. Really, Condyl, they are even better than *Many Inventions*."

"Wish I could get East," muttered Condyl gloomily. Blix forgot her own good fortune upon the instant.

"I do so wish you *could*, Condyl!" she exclaimed. "You are too good for a Sunday supplement. I know it and *you* know it, and I've heard ever so many people who have read your stories say the same thing. You could spend twenty years working as you are now, and at the end what would you be? Just an assistant editor of a Sunday supplement, and still in the same place; and worse, you'd come to be contented with that, and think you were only good for that and nothing better."

You've got it in you, Condyl, to be a great story-teller. I believe in you, and I've every confidence in you. But just so long as you stay here and are willing to do hack work, just so long you will be a hack writer. You *must* break from it; you *must* get away. I know you have a good time here; but there are so many things better than that and more worth while. You ought to make up your mind to get East, and work for that and nothing else. I know you want to go, but wanting isn't enough. Enthusiasm without energy isn't enough. You have enthusiasm, Condyl; but you *must* have energy. You must be willing to give up things; you must make up your mind that you will go East, and then set your teeth together and do it. Oh, I *love* a man that can do that—make up his mind to a thing and then put it through!"

Condyl watched her as she talked, her brown-black eyes coruscating, her cheeks glowing, her small hands curled into round pink fists.

"Blix, you're splendid!" he exclaimed; "you're fine! You could put life into a dead man. You're the kind of girl that are the making of men. By Jove, you'd back a man up, wouldn't you? You'd stand by him till the last ditch. Of course," he went on after a pause, "of course I ought to go to New York. But, Blix, suppose I went—well, then what? It isn't as though I had any income of my own, or rich aunt. Suppose I didn't find something to do—and the chances are that I wouldn't for three or four months—what would I live on in the meanwhile? 'What would the robin do then, poor thing?' I'm a poor young man, Miss Bessemer, and I've got to eat. No; my only chance is 'to be discovered' by a magazine or a publishing house or somebody, and get a bid of some kind."

"Well, there is the Centennial Company. They have taken an interest in you, Condyl. You must follow that

right up and keep your name before them all the time. Have you sent them 'A Victory Over Death' yet?"

Condy sat down to his eggs and coffee the next morning in the hotel, harried with a certain sense of depression and disappointment for which he could assign no cause. Nothing seemed to interest him. The newspaper was dull. He could look forward to no pleasure in his day's work; and what was the matter with the sun that morning? As he walked down to the office he noted no cloud in the sky, but the brightness was gone from the day. He sat down to his desk and attacked his work, but "copy" would not come. The sporting editor and his inane jokes harassed him beyond expression. Just the sight of the clipping editor's back was an irritation. The office boy was a mere incentive to profanity. There was no spring in Condy that morning, no elasticity, none of his natural buoyancy. As the day wore on, his ennui increased; his luncheon at the club was tasteless, tobacco had lost its charm. He ordered a cocktail in the wine-room, and put it aside with a wry face.

The afternoon was one long tedium. At every hour he flung his pencil down, utterly unable to formulate the next sentence of his article, and, his hands in his pockets, gazed gloomily out of the window over the wilderness of roofs—grimy, dirty, ugly roofs that spread out below. He craved diversion, amusement, excitement. Something there was that he wanted with all his heart and soul; yet he was quite unable to say what it was. Something was gone from him to-day that he had possessed yesterday, and he knew he would not regain it on the morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that. What was it? He could not say. For half an hour he imagined he was going to be sick. His mother was not to be at home that evening, and Condy dined at his club in the hopes of finding someone with whom he could go to the

theatre later on in the evening. Sargeant joined him over his coffee and cigarette, but declined to go with him to the theatre.

"Another game on to-night?" asked Condyl.

"I suppose so," admitted the other.

"I guess I'll join you to-night," said Condyl. "I've had the blue devils since morning, and I've got to have something to drive them off."

"Don't let me urge you, you know," returned Sargeant.

"Oh, that's all right!" Condyl assured him. "My time's about up, anyways."

An hour later, just as he, Sargeant, and the other men of their "set" were in the act of going upstairs to the card-rooms, a hall-boy gave Condyl a note, at that moment brought by a messenger, who was waiting for an answer. It was from Blix. She wrote:

Don't you want to come up and play cards with me to-night? We haven't had a game in over a week.

"How did she know?" thought Condyl to himself—"how could she tell?" Aloud, he said:

"I can't join you fellows, after all. 'Despatch from the managing editor.' Some special detail or other."

For the first time since the previous evening Condyl felt his spirits rise as he set off toward the Washington Street hill. But though he and Blix spent as merry an evening as they remembered in a long time, his nameless, formless irritation returned upon him almost as soon as he had bidden her good-night. It stayed with him all through the week, and told upon his work. As a result, three of his articles were thrown out by the editor.

"We can't run such rot as that in the paper," the chief had said. "Can't you give us a story?"

"Oh, I've got a kind of a yarn you can run if you

like," answered Condyl, his week's depression at its very lowest.

"A Victory Over Death" was published in the following Sunday's supplement of the *Times*, with illustrations by one of the staff artists. It attracted not the least attention.

Just before he went to bed the Sunday evening of its appearance, Condyl read it over again for the last time.

"It's a rotten failure," he muttered gloomily as he cast the paper from him. "Simple drivel. I wonder what Blix will think of it. I wonder if I amount to a hill of beans. I wonder *what* she wants to go East for, anyway."

CHAPTER IX

THE old-fashioned Union Street cable car, with its low, comfortable outside seats, put Blix and Condyl down just inside the Presidio Government Reservation. Condyl asked a direction of a sentry nursing his Krag-Jørgensen at the terminus of the track, and then with Blix set off down the long board walk through the tunnel of overhanging evergreens.

The day could not have been more desirable. It was a little after ten of a Monday morning, Condyl's weekly holiday. The air was neither cool nor warm, effervescent merely, brisk and full of the smell of grass and of the sea. The sky was a speckless sheen of pale blue. To their right, and not far off, was the bay, blue as indigo. Alcatraz seemed close at hand; beyond was the enormous green, red, and purple pyramid of Tamalpais climbing out of the water, head and shoulders above the little foothills, and looking out to the sea and to the west.

The Reservation itself was delightful. There were rows of the officers' houses, all alike, drawn up in lines like an assembly of the staff; there were huge barracks, most like college dormitories; and on their porches enlisted men in shirt sleeves and overalls were cleaning saddles, and polishing the brass of head-stalls and bridles, whistling the while or smoking corn-cob pipes. Here on the parade-ground a soldier, his coat and vest removed, was batting grounders and flies to a half-dozen of his fellows. Over by the stables, strings of horses, all of the same colour, were being curried and cleaned. A young lieutenant upon a bicycle spun si-

lently past. An officer came from his front gate, his coat unbuttoned and a briar in his teeth. The walks and roads were flanked with lines of black-painted cannon-balls; inverted pieces of abandoned ordnance stood at corners. From a distance came the mellow snarling of a bugle.

Blix and Condyl had planned a long walk for that day. They were to go out through the Presidio Reservation, past the barracks and officers' quarters, and on to the old fort at the Golden Gate. Here they would turn and follow the shore-line for a way, then strike inland across the hills for a short half mile, and regain the city and the street-car lines by way of the golf-links. Condyl had insisted upon wearing his bicycle outfit for the occasion, and, moreover, carried a little satchel, which, he said, contained a pair of shoes.

But Blix was as sweet as a rose that morning, all in tailor-made black but for the inevitable bands of white satin wrapped high and tight about her neck. The St. Bernard's dog-collar did duty as a belt. She had disdained a veil, and her yellow hair was already blowing about her smooth pink cheeks. She walked at his side, her step as firm and solid as his own, her round, strong arms swinging, her little brown eyes shining with good spirits and vigour, and the pure, clean animal joy of being alive on that fine cool Western morning. She talked almost incessantly. She was positively garrulous. She talked about the fine day that it was, about the queer new forage caps of the soldiers, about the bare green hills of the reservation, about the little cemetery they passed just beyond the limits of the barracks, about a rabbit she saw, and about the quail they both heard whistling and calling in the hollows under the bushes.

Condyl walked at her side in silence, yet no less happy than she, smoking his pipe and casting occasional glances at a great ship—a four-master that was being

towed out toward the Golden Gate. At every moment and at every turn they noted things that interested them, and to which they called each other's attention.

"Look, Blix!"

"Oh, Condyl, look at that!"

They were soon out of the miniature city of the Post, and held on down through the low reach of *tulles* and sand-dunes that stretch between the barracks and the old red fort.

"Look, Condyl!" said Blix. "What's that building down there on the shore of the bay—the one with the flagstaff?"

"I think that must be the life-boat station."

"I wonder if we could go down and visit it. I think it would be good fun."

"Idea!" exclaimed Condyl.

The station was close at hand. To reach it they had but to leave the crazy board walk that led on toward the fort, and cross a few hundred yards of sand-dune. Condyl opened the gate that broke the line of evergreen hedge around the little two-story house, and promptly unchained a veritable pandemonium of dogs.

Inside, the place was not without a certain charm of its own. A brick walk, bordered with shells, led to the front of the station, which gave directly upon the bay; a little well-kept lawn opened to right and left, and six or eight gaily-painted old row-boats were set about, half filled with loam in which fuchsias, geraniums, and mignonettes were flowering. A cat or two dozed upon the window sills in the sun. Upon a sort of porch overhead, two of the crew paced up and down in a manner that at once suggested the poop. Here and there was a gleam of highly polished red copper or brass trimmings. The bay was within two steps of the front door, while a little farther down the beach was the house where the surf-boat was kept, and the long runway leading down

from it to the water. Condý rapped boldly at the front door. It was opened by Captain Jack.

Captain Jack, and no other; only now he wore a blue sweater and a leather-visored cap, with the letters U. S. L. B. S. around the band.

Not an instant was given them for preparation. The thing had happened with the abruptness of a transformation scene at a theatre. Condý's knock had evoked a situation. Speech was stricken from their mouths. For a moment they were bereft even of action, and stood there on the threshold, staring open-mouthed and open-eyed at the sudden reappearance of their "matrimonial object." Condý was literally dumb; in the end it was Blix who tided them over the crisis.

"We were just going by—just taking a walk," she explained, "and we thought we'd like to see the station. Is it all right? Can we look around?"

"Why, of course," assented the Captain with great cordiality. "Come right in. This is visitors' day. You just happened to hit it—only it's mighty few visitors we ever have," he added.

While Condý was registering for himself and Blix, they managed to exchange a lightning glance. It was evident the Captain did not recognize them. The situation readjusted itself, even promised to be of extraordinary interest. And for that matter it made little difference whether the Captain remembered them or not.

"No, we don't get many visitors," the Captain went on, as he led them out of the station and down the small gravel walk to the house where the surf-boat was kept. "This is a quiet station. People don't fetch out this way very often, and we're not called out very often either. We're an inside post, you see, and usually we don't get a call unless the sea's so high that the Cliff House station can't launch their boat. So, you see, we don't go out

much; but when we *do*, it means business with a great big B. Now this here, you see," continued the Captain, rolling back the sliding doors of the house, "is the surf-boat. By the way, let's see; I ain't just caught your names yet."

"Well, my name's Rivers," said Condry, "and this is Miss Bessemer. We're both from the city."

"Happy to know you, sir; happy to know you, miss," he returned, pulling off his cap. "My name's Hoskins, but you can just call me Captain Jack. I'm so used to it that I don't kind of answer to the other. Well, now, Miss Bessemer, this here's the surf-boat; she's self-right-in', self-bailin', she can't capsize, and if I was to tell you how many thousands of dollars she cost, you wouldn't believe me."

Condry and Blix spent a delightful half-hour in the boat-house while Captain Jack explained and illustrated and told them anecdotes of wrecks, escapes, and rescues till they held their breaths like ten-year-olds.

It did not take Condry long to know that he had discovered what the story-teller so often tells of but so seldom finds, and what, for want of a better name, he elects to call "a character."

Captain Jack had been everywhere, had seen everything, and had done most of the things worth doing, including a great many things that he had far better have left undone. But on this latter point the Captain seemed to be innocently and completely devoid of a moral sense of right and wrong. It was quite evident that he saw no matter for conscience in the smuggling of Chinamen across the Canadian border at thirty dollars a head—a venture in which he had had the assistance of the prodigal son of an American divine of international renown. The trade to Peruvian insurgents of condemned rifles was to be regretted only because the ring manipulating it was broken up. The appropriation of a schooner

in the harbour of Callao was a story in itself; while the robbery of thirty thousand dollars' worth of sea-otter skins from a Russian trading-post in Alaska, accomplished chiefly through the agency of a barrel of rum manufactured from sugar-cane, was a veritable achievement.

He had been born, so he told them, in Winchester, in England, and—Heaven save the mark!—had been brought up with a view of taking orders. For some time he was a choir boy in the great Winchester Cathedral; then, while yet a lad, had gone to sea. He had been boat-steerer on a New Bedford whaler, and struck his first whale when only sixteen. He had filibustered down to Chili; had acted as ice pilot on an Arctic relief expedition; had captained a crew of Chinamen shark-fishing in Magdalena Bay, and had been nearly murdered by his men; had been a deep-sea diver, and had burst his ear-drums at the business, so that now he could blow tobacco smoke out of his ears; he had been shipwrecked in the Gilberts, fought with the Seris on the lower California Islands, sold champagne—made from rock candy, effervescent salts, and Reisling wine—to the Coreans, had dreamed of “holding up” a Cunard liner, and had ridden on the Strand in a hansom with William Ewart Gladstone. But the one thing of which he was proud, the one picture of his life he most delighted to recall, was himself as manager of a negro minstrel troupe, in a hired drum-major's uniform, marching down the streets of Sacramento at the head of the brass band in burnt cork and regimentals.

“The star of the troupe,” he told them, “was the lady with the iron jore. We busted in Stockton, and she gave me her diamonds to pawn. I pawned 'em, and kept back something in the hand for myself and hooked it to San Francisco. Strike me straight if she didn't follow me, that iron-jored piece; met me one day in front of the

Bush Street Theatre, and horsewhipped me properly. Now, just think of that,"—and he laughed as though it was the best kind of a joke.

"But," hazarded Blix, "don't you find it rather dull out here—lonesome? I should think you would want to have someone with you to keep you company—to—to do your cooking for you?"

But Condyl, ignoring her diplomacy and thinking only of possible stories, blundered off upon another track.

"Yes," he said, "you've led such a life of action, I should think this station would be pretty dull for you. How did you happen to choose it?"

"Well, you see," answered the Captain, leaning against the smooth white flank of the surf-boat, his hands in his pockets, "I'm lying low just now. I got into a scrape down at Libertad, in Mexico, that made talk, and I'm waiting for that to die down some. You see, it was this way."

Mindful of their experience with the mate of the whaleback, Condyl and Blix were all attention in an instant. Blix sat down upon an upturned box, her elbows on her knees, leaning forward, her little eyes fixed and shining with interest and expectation; Condyl, the storyteller all alive and vibrant in him, stood at her elbow, smoking cigarette after cigarette, his fingers dancing with excitement and animation as the Captain spoke.

And then it was that Condyl and Blix, in that isolated station, the bay lapping at the shore within ear-shot, in that atmosphere redolent of paint and oakum and of seaweed decaying upon the beach outside, first heard the story of "In Defiance of Authority."

Captain Jack began it with his experience as a restaurant keeper during the boom days in Seattle, Washington. He told them how he was the cashier of a dining saloon whose daily net profits exceeded eight hundred dollars; how its proprietor suddenly died, and how he,

Captain Jack, continued the management of the restaurant pending a settlement of the proprietor's affairs and an appearance of heirs; how in the confusion and excitement of the boom no settlement was ever made; and how, no heirs appearing, he assumed charge of the establishment himself, paying bills, making contracts, and signing notes, until he came to consider the business and all its enormous profits as his own; and how at last, when the restaurant was burned, he found himself some forty thousand dollars "ahead of the game."

Then he told them of the strange club of the place, called "The Exiles," made up chiefly of "younger sons" of English and British-Canadian families, every member possessed of a "past" more or less disreputable; men who had left their country for their country's good, and for their family's peace of mind—adventurers, wanderers, soldiers of fortune, gentlemen vagabonds, men of hyphenated names and even noble birth, whose appellations were avowedly aliases. He told them of his meeting with Billy Isham, one of the club's directors, and of the happy-go-lucky, reckless, unpractical character of the man; of their acquaintance, intimacy, and subsequent partnership; of how the filibustering project was started with Captain Jack's forty thousand, and the never-to-be-forgotten interview in San Francisco with Señora Estrada, the agent of the insurgents; of the incident of her calling-card—how she tore it in two and gave one-half to Isham; of their outfitting, and the broken sextant that was to cause their ultimate discomfiture and disaster, and of the voyage to the rendezvous on a Panama liner.

"Strike me!" continued Captain Jack, "you should have seen Billy Isham on that Panama dough-dish; a passenger ship she was, and Billy was the life of her from stem to stern-post. There was a church pulpit aboard that they were taking down to Mazatlan for some chapel

or other, and this here pulpit was lashed on deck aft. Well, Billy had been most kinds of a fool in his life, and amongst others a play-actor; called hisself Gaston Maundeville, and was clean daft on his knowledge of Shakespeare and his own power of interpretin' the hidden meanin' of the lines. I ain't never going to forgit the day he gave us Portia's speech. We were just under the tropic, and the day was a scorcher. There was mostly men folk aboard, and we lay around the deck in our pajamas, while Billy—Gaston Maundeville, dressed in striped red-and-white pajamas—clum up in that bally pulpit, with the ship's Shakespeare in his hands, an' let us have—'The quality o' mercy isn't strained; it droppeth as the genteel dew from heavun.' Laugh, I tell you I was sore with it. Lord, how we guyed him! An' the more we guyed and the more we laughed, the more serious he got and the madder he grew. He said he was interpretin' the hidden meanin' of the lines."

And so the Captain ran through that wild, fiery tale—of fighting and loving, buccaneering and conspiring; mandolins tinkling, knives clicking; oaths mingling with sonnets, and spilled wine with spilled blood. He told them of Isham's knife duel with the Mexican lieutenant, their left wrists lashed together; of the "battle of the thirty" in the pitch dark of the Custom-House cellar; of Señora Estrada's love for Isham; and all the roll and plunge of action that make up the story of "In Defiance of Authority."

At the end, Blix's little eyes were snapping like sparks; Condyl's face was flaming, his hands were cold, and he was shifting his weight from foot to foot, like an excited thoroughbred horse.

"Heavens and earth, what a yarn!" he exclaimed, almost in a whisper.

Blix drew a long, tremulous breath and sat back upon

the upturned box, looking around her as though she had but that moment been awakened.

"Yes, sir," said the Captain, rolling a cigarette. "Yes, sir, those were great days. Get down there around the line in those little, out-o'-the-way republics along the South American coast, and things happen to you. You hold a man's life in the crook of your forefinger, an' nothing's done by halves. If you hate a man, you lay awake nights biting your mattress, just thinking how you hate him; an' if you love a woman, good Lord, how you do *love* her!"

"But—but!" exclaimed Condry, "I don't see how you can want to do anything else. Why, you're living sixty to the minute when you're playing a game like that!"

"Oh, I ain't dead yet!" answered the Captain. "I got a few schemes left that I could get fun out of."

"How can you wait a minute!" exclaimed Blix breathlessly. "Why don't you get a ship right away—to-morrow—and go right off on some other adventure?"

"Well, I can't just now," returned the Captain, blowing the smoke from his cigarette through his ears. "There's a good many reasons; one of 'em is that I've just been married."

CHAPTER X

MUM "MAR—MARRIED!" gasped Condyl, swallowing something in his throat.

Blix rose to her feet.

"Just been *married!*" she repeated, a little frightened. "Why—why—why, how *delightful!*"

"Yes—yes," mumbled Condyl. "How delightful. I congratulate you!"

"Come in—come back to the station," said the Captain jovially, "and I'll introduce you to m' wife. We were married only last Sunday."

"Why, yes—yes, of course, we'd be delighted," vociferated the two conspirators a little hysterically.

"She's a mighty fine little woman," declared the Captain, as he rolled the door of the boat-house to its place and preceded them up the gravel walk to the station.

"Of course she is," responded Blix. Behind Captain Jack's back she fixed Condyl with a wide-eyed look, and nudged him fiercely with an elbow to recall him to himself; for Condyl's wits were scattered like a flock of terrified birds, and he was gazing blankly at the Captain's coat collar with a vacant, maniacal smile.

"For Heaven's sake, Condyl!" she had time to whisper before they arrived in the hallway of the station.

But fortunately they were allowed a minute or so to recover themselves and prepare for what was coming. Captain Jack ushered them into what was either the parlour, office, or sitting room of the station, and left them with the words:

"Just make yourselves comfortable here, an' I'll go fetch the little woman."

No sooner had he gone than the two turned to each other.

"Well!"

"*Well!*"

"We're in for it now."

"But we must see it through, Condyl; act just as natural as you can, and we're all right."

"But supposing *she* recognizes us?"

"Supposing she does—what then? How *are* they to know that we wrote the letters?"

"Sh, Blix, not so loud! They know by now that *they* didn't."

"But it seems that it hasn't made any difference to them; they are married. And besides, they wouldn't speak about putting 'personals' in the paper to us. They would never let anybody know that."

"Do you suppose they could possibly suspect?"

"I'm sure they couldn't."

"Here they come."

"Keep perfectly calm, and we're saved."

"Suppose it isn't K. D. B., after all?"

But it was, of course, and she recognized them in an instant. She and the Captain—the latter all grins—came in from the direction of the kitchen, K. D. B. wearing a neat blue calico gown and an apron that was really a marvel of cleanliness and starch.

"Kitty!" exclaimed Captain Jack, seized again with an unexplainable mirth, "here's some young folks come out to see the place, an' I want you to know 'em. Mr. Rivers, this is m' wife, Kitty, and—lessee, miss, I don't rightly remember your name."

"Bessemer!" exclaimed Condyl and Blix in a breath.

"Oh!" exclaimed K. D. B., "you were in the restaurant the night that the Captain and I—I—that is—yes,

"I'm quite sure I've seen you before." She turned from one to the other, beginning to blush furiously.

"Yes, yes, in Luna's restaurant, wasn't it?" said Condyl desperately. "It seems to me I do just barely remember."

"And wasn't the Captain there?" Blix ventured.

"I forgot my stick, I remember," continued Condyl. "I came back for it; and just as I was going out, it seems to me I saw you two at a table near the door."

He thought it best to allow their "matrimonial objects" to believe he had not seen them before.

"Yes, yes, we were there," answered K. D. B. tactfully. "We dine there almost every Monday night."

Blix guessed that K. D. B. would prefer to have the real facts of the situation ignored, and determined she should have the chance to change the conversation if she wished.

"What a delicious supper one has there!" she said.

"Can't say I like Mexican cooking myself," answered K. D. B., forgetting that they dined there every Monday night. "Plain United States is good enough for me."

Suddenly Captain Jack turned abruptly to Condyl, exclaiming: "Oh, *you* was the chap that called the picture of that schooner a barkentine."

"Yes, *wasn't* that a barkentine?" he answered innocently.

"Barkentine your *eye*!" spluttered the Captain. "Why, that was a schooner as plain as a pie plate."

But ten minutes later the ordeal was over, and Blix and Condyl, once more breathing easy, were on their walk again. The Captain and K. D. B. had even accompanied them to the gate of the station, and had strenuously urged them to "come in and see them again the next time they were out that way."

"Married!" murmured Condyl, putting both hands to his head. "We've done it, we've done it now."

"Well, what of it?" declared Blix, a little defiantly. "I think it's all right. You can see the Captain is in love with her, and she with him. No, we've nothing to reproach ourselves with."

"But—but—but so sudden!" whispered Condyl, all aghast. "That's what makes me faint—the suddenness of it."

"It shows how much they are in love, how—how readily they—adapted themselves to each other. No, it's all right."

"They seemed to like us—actually."

"Well, they had better—if they knew the truth. Without us they never would have met."

"They both asked us to come out and see them again, did you notice that? Let's do it, Blix," Condyl suddenly exclaimed; "let's get to know them."

"Of course we must. Wouldn't it be fun to call on them—to get regularly acquainted with them!"

"They might ask us to dinner some time."

"And think of the stories he could tell you!"

They enthused immediately upon this subject, both talking excitedly at the same time, going over the details of the Captain's yarns, recalling the incidents to each other.

"Fancy!" exclaimed Condyl—"fancy Billy Isham in his pajamas, red-and-white stripes, reading Shakespeare from that pulpit on board the ship, and the other men guying him! Isn't that a *scene* for you? Can't you just see it?"

"I wonder if the Captain wasn't making all those things up as he went along. He don't seem to have any sense of right and wrong at all. He might have been lying, Condyl."

"What difference would that make?"

And so they went along in that fine, clear, Western morning, on the edge of the Continent, both of them

young and strong and vigorous, the Pacific under their eyes, the great clean Trades blowing in their faces, the smell of the salt sea coming in long aromatic whiffs to their nostrils. Young and strong and fresh, their imaginations thronging with pictures of vigorous action and adventure, buccaneering, filibustering, and all the swing, the leap, the rush and gallop, the exuberant, strong life of the great, uncharted world of Romance.

And all unknowingly they were a Romance in themselves. Cynicism, old age, and the weariness of all things done had no place in the world in which they walked. They still had their illusions, all the keenness of their sensations, all the vividness of their impressions. The simple things of the world, the great, broad, primal emotions of the race stirred in them. As they swung along, going toward the ocean, their brains were almost as empty of thought or of reflection as those of two fine, clean animals. They were all for the immediate sensation; they did not think—they *felt*. The intellect was dormant; they looked at things, they heard things, they smelt the smell of the sea, and of the seaweed, of the fat, rank growth of cresses in the salt marshes; they turned their cheeks to the passing wind, and filled their mouths and breasts with it. Their life was sweet to them; every hour was one glad effervescence. The fact that the ocean was blue was a matter for rejoicing. It was good to be alive on that royal morning. Just to be young was an exhilaration; and everything was young with them—the day was young, the country was young, and the civilization to which they belonged, teeming there upon the green, Western fringe of the continent, was young and heady and tumultuous with the boisterous, red blood of a new race.

Condy even forgot, or rather disdained on such a morning as that, to piece together and rearrange Captain Jack's yarns into story form. To look at the sea

and the green hills, to watch the pink on Blix's cheek and her yellow hair blowing across her eyes and lips, was better than thinking. Life was better than literature. To live was better than to read; one live human being was better than ten thousand Shakespeares; an act was better than a thought. Why, just to love Blix, to be with her, to see the sweet, clean flush of her cheek, to know that she was there at his side, and to have the touch of her elbow as they walked, was better than the best story, the greatest novel he could ever hope to write. Life was better than literature, and love was the best thing in life. To love Blix and to be near her—what else was worth while? Could he ever think of finding anything in life sweeter and finer than this dear young girl of nineteen?

Suddenly Condry came to himself with an abrupt start. What was this he was thinking—what was this he was telling himself? Love Blix! He loved Blix! Why, of *course* he loved her—loved her so, that with the thought of it there came a great, sudden clutch at the heart and a strange sense of tenderness, so vague and yet so great that it eluded speech and all expression. Love her! Of course he loved her! He had, all unknowing, loved her even before this wonderful morning; had loved her that day at the lake, and that never-to-be-forgotten, delicious afternoon in the Chinese restaurant; all those long, quiet evenings spent in the window of the little dining room, looking down upon the darkening city, he had loved her. Why, all his days for the last few months had been full of the love of her.

How else had he been so happy? how else did it come about that little by little he was withdrawing from the society and influence of his artificial world, as represented by such men as Sargeant? how else was he slowly loosening the grip of the one evil and vicious habit that had clutched him so long? how else was his ambition

stirring? how else was his hitherto aimless enthusiasm hardening to energy and determination? She had not always so influenced him. In the days when they had just known each other, and met each other in the weekly course of their formal life, it had not been so, even though they pretended a certain amount of affection. He remembered the evening when Blix had brought those days to an abrupt end, and how at the moment he had told himself that after all he had never known the real Blix. Since then, in the charming, unconventional life they had led, everything had been changed. He had come to know her for what she was, to know her genuine goodness, her sincerity, her contempt of affectations, her comradeship, her calm, fine strength and unbroken good nature; and day by day, here a little and there a little, his love for her had grown so quietly, so evenly, that he had never known it, until now, behold! it was suddenly come to flower, full and strong—a flower whose fragrance had suddenly filled all his life and all his world with its sweetness.

Half an hour after leaving the life-boat station, Condry and Blix reached the old, red-brick fort, deserted, abandoned, and rime-encrusted, at the entrance of the Golden Gate. They turned its angle, and there rolled the Pacific, a blue floor of shifting water, stretching out there forever and forever over the curve of the earth, over the shoulder of the world, with never a sail in view and never a break from horizon to horizon.

They followed down the shore, sometimes upon the old and broken flume that runs along the seaward face of the hills that rise from the beach, or sometimes upon the beach itself, stepping from boulder to boulder, or holding along at the edge of the water upon reaches of white, hard sand.

The beach was solitary; not a soul was in sight. Close at hand, to landward, great hills, bare and green, shut

off the sky; and here and there the land came tumbling down into the sea in great, jagged, craggy rocks, knee-deep in swirling foam, and all black with wet. The air was full of the prolonged thunder of the surf, and at intervals sea-birds passed overhead with an occasional, piping cry. Wreckage was tumbled about here and there; and innumerable cocoanut shards, huge, brown cups of fuzzy bark, lay under foot and in the crevices of the rocks. They found a jelly-fish—a pulpy, translucent mass; and once even caught a sight of a seal in the hollow of a breaker, with sleek and shining head, his barbels bristling, and heard his hoarse croaking bark as he hunted the off-shore fish.

Blix refused to allow Condyl to help her in the least. She was quite as active and strong as he, and clambered from rock to rock and over the shattered scantling of the flume with the vigour and agility of a young boy. She muddied her shoes to the very tops, scratched her hands, tore her skirt, and even twisted her ankle; but her little eyes were never so bright, nor was the pink flush of her cheeks ever more adorable. And she was never done talking—a veritable chatterbox. She saw everything and talked about everything she saw, quite indifferent as to whether or no Condyl listened. Now it was a queer bit of seaweed, now it was a group of gulls clamouring over a dead fish, now a purple star-fish, now a breaker of unusual size. Her splendid vitality carried her away. She was excited, alive to her very finger-tips, vibrant to the least sensation, quivering to the least impression.

“Let’s get up here and sit down somewhere,” said Condyl, at length.

They left the beach and climbed up the slope of the hills, near a point where a long arm of land thrust out into the sea and shut off the wind; a path was there, and they followed it for a few yards, till they had come to a little amphitheatre surrounded with blackberry bushes.

Here they sat down, Blix settling herself on an old log with a little sigh of contentment, Condyl stretching himself out, a new-lit pipe in his teeth, his head resting on the little handbag he had persistently carried ever since morning. Then Blix fell suddenly silent, and for a long time the two sat there without speaking, absorbed in the enjoyment of looking at the enormous green hills rolling down to the sea, the breakers thundering at the beach, the gashed pinnacles of rock, the vast reach of the Pacific, and the distant prospect of the old fort at the entrance of the Golden Gate.

"We might be a thousand miles away from the city, for all the looks of it, mightn't we, Condyl?" said Blix, after a while. "And I'm that *hungry*! It must be nearly noon."

For answer, Condyl sat up with profound gravity, and with a great air of nonchalance opened the handbag, and, instead of shoes, took out, first, a pint bottle of claret, then "devilish" ham sandwiches in oiled paper, a bottle of stuffed olives, a great bag of salted almonds, two little tumblers, a paper-covered novel, and a mouth organ.

Blix fairly crowed with delight, clasping her hands upon her knees, and rocking to and fro where she sat upon the log.

"Oh, Condyl, and you thought of a *lunch*—you said it was shoes—and you remembered I loved stuffed olives, too; and a book to read. What is it—*The Seven Seas*? No, I never *was* so happy. But the mouth organ—what's that for?"

"To play on. What did you think—think it was a can-opener?"

Blix choked with merriment over his foolery, and Condyl added proudly:

"Look there! *I* made those sandwiches!"

They looked as though he had—great, fat chunks of

bread, the crust still on; the "devilish" ham in thick strata between; and, positively, he had *buttered* the bread. But it was all one with them; they ate as though at a banquet, and Blix even took off her hat and hung it upon one of the near-by bushes. Of course Condyl had forgotten a corkscrew. He tried to dig out the cork of the claret bottle with his knife, until he had broken both blades and was about to give up in despair, when Blix, at the end of her patience, took the bottle from him and pushed in the cork with her finger.

"Wine, music, literature, and feasting," observed Condyl. "We're getting regularly luxurious, just like Sardineapalus."

But Condyl himself had suddenly entered into an atmosphere of happiness, the like of which he had never known or dreamed of before. He loved Blix—he had just discovered it. He loved her because she was so genuine, so radiantly fresh and strong; loved her because she liked the things that he liked, because they two looked at the world from precisely the same point of view, hating shams and affectations, happy in the things that were simple and honest and natural. He loved her because she liked his books, appreciating the things therein that he appreciated, liking what he liked, disapproving of what he condemned. He loved her because she was nineteen, and because she was so young and unspoiled and was happy just because the ocean was blue and the morning fine. He loved her because she was so pretty, because of the softness of her yellow hair, because of her round, white forehead and pink cheeks, because of her little, dark-brown eyes, with that look in them as if she were just done smiling or just about to smile, one could not say which; loved her because of her good, firm mouth and chin, because of her full neck and its high, tight bands of white satin. And he loved her because her arms were strong and round, and because she

wore the great dog-collar around her trim, firm-corseted waist, and because there emanated from her with every movement a barely perceptible, delicious, feminine odour, that was in part perfume, but mostly a subtle, vague aroma, charming beyond words, that came from her mouth, her hair, her neck, her arms, her whole sweet personality. And he loved her because she was herself, because she was Blix, because of that strange, sweet influence that was disengaged from her in those quiet moments when she seemed so close to him, when some unnamed, mysterious, sixth sense in him stirred and woke and told him of her goodness, of her clean purity and womanliness; and that certain, vague tenderness in him went out toward her, a tenderness not for her only, but for all the good things of the world; and he felt his nobler side rousing up and the awakening of the desire to be his better self.

Covertly he looked at her, as she sat near him, her yellow hair rolling and blowing back from her forehead, her hands clasped over her knee, looking out over the ocean, thoughtful, her eyes wide.

She had told him she did not love him. Condry remembered that perfectly well. She was sincere in the matter; she did not love him. That subject had been once and for all banished from their intercourse. And it was because of that very reason that their companionship of the last three or four months had been so charming. She looked upon him merely as a chum. She had not changed in the least from that time until now, whereas he—why, all his world was new for him that morning! Why, he loved her so, she had become so dear to him, that the very thought of her made his heart swell and leap.

But he must keep all this to himself. If he spoke to her, told her of how he loved her, it would spoil and end their companionship upon the instant. They had both

agreed upon that; they had tried the other, and it had worked out. As lovers they had wearied of each other; as chums they had been perfectly congenial, thoroughly and completely happy.

Condy set his teeth. It was a hard situation. He must choose between bringing an end to this charming comradeship of theirs, or else fight back all show of love for her, keep it down and under hand, and that at a time when every nerve of him quivered like a smitten harp-string. It was not in him or in his temperament to love her calmly, quietly, or at a distance; he wanted the touch of her hand, the touch of her cool, smooth cheek, the delicious aroma of her breath in his nostrils, her lips against his, her hair and all its fragrance in his face.

"Condy, what's the matter?" Blix was looking at him with an expression of no little concern. "What are you frowning so about, and clinching your fists? And you're pale, too. What's gone wrong?"

He shot a glance at her, and bestirred himself sharply.

"Isn't this a jolly little corner?" he said. "Blix, how long is it before you go?"

"Six weeks from to-morrow."

"And you're going to be gone four years—four years! Maybe you never will come back. Can't tell what will happen in four years. Where's the blooming mouth organ?"

But the mouth organ was full of crumbs. Condy could not play on it. To all his efforts it responded only by gasps, mournfullest death-rattles, and lamentable wails. Condy hurled it into the sea.

"Well, where's the blooming book, then?" he demanded. "You're sitting on it, Blix. Here, read something in it. Open it anywhere."

"No; you read to me."

"I will not. Haven't I done enough! Didn't I *buy* the book and get the lunch, and make the sandwiches,

and pay the car fare. I think this expedition will cost me pretty near three dollars before we're through with the day. No; the least you can do is to read to me. Here, we'll match for it."

Condý drew a dime from his pocket, and Blix a quarter from her purse.

"You're matching *me*," she said.

Condý tossed the coin and lost, and Blix said, as he picked up the book:

"For a man that has such unvarying bad luck as you, gambling is just simple madness. You and I have never played a game of poker yet that I've not won every cent of money you had."

"Yes; and what are you doing with it all?"

"Spending it," she returned loftily; "gloves and veils and lace pins—all kinds of things."

But Condý knew the way she spoke that this was not true.

For the next hour or so he read to her from *The Seven Seas*, while the afternoon passed, the wind stirring the chaparral and blackberry bushes in the hollows of the huge, bare hills, the surf rolling and grumbling on the beach below, the sea-birds wheeling overhead. Blix listened intently, but Condý could not have told of what he was reading. Living was better than reading, life was better than literature, and his new-found love for her was poetry enough for him. He read so that he might not talk to her or look at her, for it seemed to him at times as though some second self in him would speak and betray him in spite of his best efforts. Never before in all his life had he been so happy; never before had he been so troubled. He began to jumble the lines and words as he read, overrunning periods, even turning two pages at once.

"What a splendid line!" Blix exclaimed.

"What line—what—what are you talking about?"

Blix, let's always remember to-day. Let's make a promise, no matter what happens or where we are, let's always write to each other on the anniversary of to-day. What do you say?"

"Yes; I'll promise—and you——"

"I'll promise faithfully. Oh, I'll never forget to-day nor—yes, yes; I'll promise—why, to-day—Blix—where's that damn book gone?"

"Condy!"

"Well, I can't find the book. You're sitting on it again. Confound the book, anyway! Let's walk some more."

"We've a long ways to go if we're to get home in time for supper. Let's go to Luna's for supper."

"I never saw such a girl as you to think of ways for spending money. What kind of a purse-proud plutocrat do you think I am? I've only seventy-five cents left. How much have you got?"

Blix had fifty-five cents in her purse, and they had a grave council over their finances. They had just enough for carfare and two "suppers Mexican," with ten cents left over.

"That's for Richard's tip," said Blix.

"That's for my *cigar*," he retorted.

"You made *me* give him fifty cents. You said it was the least I could offer him—*noblesse oblige*."

"Well, then, I *couldn't* offer him a dime, don't you see? I'll tell him we are broke this time."

They started home, not as they had come, but climbing the hill and going on across a breezy open down, radiant with blue iris, wild heliotrope, yellow poppies, and even a violet here and there. A little farther on they gained one of the roads of the Reservation, red earth smooth as a billiard table; and just at an angle where the road made a sharp elbow and trended cityward, they paused for a moment and looked down and back at the

superb view of the ocean, the vast half-moon of land, and the rolling hills in the foreground tumbling down toward the beach and all spangled with wild flowers.

Some fifteen minutes later they reached the golf links.

"We can go across the links," said Condyl, "and strike any number of car lines on the other side."

They left the road and struck across the links, Condyl smoking his new-lit pipe. But as they came around the edge of a long line of eucalyptus trees near the teeing ground, a warning voice suddenly called out:

"Fore!"

Condyl and Blix looked up sharply, and there in a group not twenty feet away, in tweeds and "knickers," in smart, short golfing skirts and plaid cloaks, they saw young Sargeant and his sister, two other girls whom they knew as members of the fashionable "set," and Jack Carter in the act of swinging his driving iron.

CHAPTER XI

AS THE clock in the library of the club struck midnight, Condry laid down his pen, shoved the closely written sheets of paper from him, and leaned back in his chair, his fingers to his tired eyes. He was sitting at a desk in one of the farther corners of the room and shut off by a great Japanese screen. He was in his shirt-sleeves, his hair was tumbled, his fingers ink-stained, and his face a little pale.

Since late in the evening he had been steadily writing. Three chapters of *In Defiance of Authority* were done, and he was now at work on the fourth. The day after the excursion to the Presidio—that wonderful event which seemed to Condry to mark the birthday of some new man within him—the idea had suddenly occurred to him that Captain Jack's story of the club of the exiles, the boom restaurant, and the filibustering expedition was precisely the novel of adventure of which the Centennial Company had spoken. At once he had set to work upon it, with an enthusiasm that, with shut teeth, he declared would not be lacking in energy. The story would have to be written out of his business hours. That meant he would have to give up his evenings to it. But he had done this, and for nearly a week had settled himself to his task in the quiet corner of the club at eight o'clock, and held to it resolutely until twelve.

The first two chapters had run off his pen with delightful ease. The third came harder; the events and incidents of the story became confused and contradictory; the character of Billy Isham obstinately refused to take the prominent place which Condry had designed

for him; and with the beginning of the fourth chapter, Condyl had finally come to know the enormous difficulties, the exasperating complications, the discouragements that begin anew with every paragraph, the obstacles that refuse to be surmounted, and all the pain, the labour, the downright mental travail and anguish that fall to the lot of the writer of novels.

To write a short story with the end in plain sight from the beginning was an easy matter compared to the up-building, grain by grain, atom by atom, of the fabric of *In Defiance of Authority*. Condyl soon found that there was but one way to go about the business. He must shut his eyes to the end of his novel—that far-off, divine event—and take his task chapter by chapter, even paragraph by paragraph; grinding out the tale, as it were, by main strength, driving his pen from line to line, hating the effort, happy only with the termination of each chapter, and working away, hour by hour, minute by minute, with the dogged, sullen, hammer-and-tongs obstinacy of the galley-slave, scourged to his daily toil.

At times the tale, apparently out of sheer perversity, would come to a full stop. To write another word seemed beyond the power of human ingenuity, and for an hour or more Condyl would sit scowling at the half-written page, gnawing his nails, scouring his hair, dipping his pen into the ink-well, and squaring himself to the sheet of paper, all to no purpose.

There was no pleasure in it for him. A character once fixed in his mind, a scene once pictured in his imagination, and even before he had written a word the character lost the charm of its novelty, the scene the freshness of its original conception. Then, with infinite painstaking and with a patience little short of miraculous, he must slowly build up, brick by brick, the plan his brain had outlined in a single instant. It was all

work—hard, disagreeable, laborious work; and no juggling with phrases, no false notions as to the “delight of creation.” could make it appear otherwise. “And for what,” he muttered as he rose, rolled up his sheaf of manuscript, and put on his coat; “what do I do it for, I don’t know.”

It was beyond question that, had he begun his novel three months before this time, Condry would have long since abandoned the hateful task. But Blix had changed all that. A sudden male force had begun to develop in Condry. A master-emotion had shaken him, and he had commenced to see and to feel the serious, more abiding, and perhaps the sterner side of life. Blix had steadied him, there was no denying that. He was not quite the same boyish, harebrained fellow who had made “a buffoon of himself” in the Chinese restaurant, three months before.

The cars had stopped running by the time Condry reached the street. He walked home and flung himself to bed, his mind tired, his nerves unstrung, and all the blood of his body apparently concentrated in his brain. Working at night after writing all day long was telling upon him, and he knew it.

What with his work and his companionship with Blix, Condry soon began to drop out of his wonted place in his “set.” He was obliged to decline one invitation after another that would take him out in the evening, and instead of lunching at his club with Sargeant or George Hands, as he had been accustomed to do at one time, he fell into another habit of lunching with Blix at the flat on Washington Street, and spending the two hours allowed to him in the middle of the day in her company.

Condry’s desertion of them was often spoken of by the men of his club with whom he had been at one time so intimate, and the subject happened to be brought up again one noon when Jack Carter was in the club as

George Hands's guest. Hands, Carter, and Eckert were at one of the windows over their after-dinner cigars and liqueurs.

"I say," said Eckert suddenly, "who's that girl across the street there—the one in black, just going by that furrier's sign? I've seen her somewhere before. Know who it is?"

"That's Miss Bessemer, isn't it?" said George Hands, leaning forward. "Rather a stunning-looking girl."

"Yes, that's Travis Bessemer," assented Jack Carter; adding, a moment later, "It's too bad about that girl."

"What's the matter?" asked Eckert.

Carter lifted a shoulder. "Isn't *anything* the matter as far as I know, only somehow the best people have dropped her. She *used* to be received everywhere."

"Come to think, I *haven't* seen her out much this season," said Eckert. "But I heard she had bolted from 'Society' with the big S, and was going East—going to study medicine, I believe."

"I've always noticed," said Carter, with a smile, "that so soon as a girl is *déclassée*, she develops a purpose in life, and gets earnest, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, well, come," growled George Hands. "Travis Bessemer is not *déclassée*."

"I didn't say she was," answered Carter; "but she has made herself talked about a good deal lately. Going around with Rivers, as she does, isn't the most discreet thing in the world. Of course it's all right, but it all makes talk; and I came across them by a grove of trees out on the links the other day——"

"Yes" observed Sargeant, leaning on the back of Carter's armchair; "yes; and I noticed, too, that she cut you dead. You fellows should have been there," he went on, in perfect good humour, turning to the others. "You missed a good little scene. Rivers and Miss Bessemer had been taking a tramp over the Reservation

—and, by the way, it's a great place to walk, so my sister tells me; she and Dick Forsythe take a constitutional out there every Saturday morning—well, as I was saying, Rivers and Miss Bessemer came upon our party rather unexpectedly. We were all togged out in our golfing bags, and I presume we looked more like tailors' models, posing for the gallery, than people who were taking an outing; but Rivers and Miss Bessemer had been regularly exercising; looked as though they had done their fifteen miles since morning. They had their old clothes on, and they were dusty and muddy.

"You would have thought that a young girl such as Miss Bessemer is—for she's very young—would have been a little embarrassed at running up against such a spick-and-span lot as we were. Not a bit of it; didn't lose her poise for a moment. She bowed to my sister and to me, as though from the top of a drag, by Jove! and as though she were fresh from Redfern and Virot. You know a girl that can manage herself that way is a thoroughbred. She even remembered to cut little Johnnie Carter here, because Johnnie forced himself upon her one night at a dance when he was drunk; didn't she, Johnnie? Johnnie came up to her there, out on the links, fresh as a daisy, and put out his hand, with, 'Why, how do you do, Miss Bessemer?' and 'wherever did you come from?' and 'I haven't seen you in so long'; and she says, 'No, not since our last dance, I believe, Mr. Carter,' and looked at his hand as though it was something funny.

"Little Johnnie mumbled and flushed and stammered and backed off; and it was well that he did, because Rivers had begun to get red around the wattles. *I* say the little girl is a thoroughbred, and my sister wants to give her a dinner as soon as she comes out. But Johnnie says she's *déclassée*, so maybe my sister had better think it over."

"I didn't say she was *déclassée*," exclaimed Carter. "I only said she would do well to be more careful."

Sargeant shifted his cigar to the other corner of his mouth, one eye shut to avoid the smoke.

"One might say as much of lots of people," he answered.

"I don't like your tone!" Carter flared out.

"Oh, go to the devil, Johnnie! Shall we all have a drink?"

On the Friday evening of that week, Condyl set himself to his work at his accustomed hour. But he had had a hard day on the *Times* Supplement, and his brain, like an overdriven horse, refused to work. In half an hour he had not written a paragraph.

"I thought it would be better, in the end, to loaf for one evening," he explained to Blix, some twenty minutes later, as they settled themselves in the little dining room. "I can go at it better to-morrow. See how you like this last chapter."

Blix was enthusiastic over *In Defiance of Authority*. Condyl had told her the outline of the story, and had read to her each chapter as he finished it.

"It's the best thing you have ever done, Condyl, and you know it. I suppose it has faults, but I don't care anything about them. It's the story itself that's so interesting. After that first chapter of the boom restaurant and the exiles' club, nobody would want to lay the book down. You're doing the best work of your life so far, and you stick to it."

"It's grinding out copy for the Supplement at the same time that takes all the starch out of me. You've no idea what it means to write all day, and then sit down and write all evening."

"I *wish* you could get off the *Times*," said Blix. "You're just giving the best part of your life to hack work, and *now* it's interfering with your novel. I

know you could do better work on your novel if you didn't have to work on the *Times*, couldn't you?"

"Oh, if you come to that, of course I could," he answered. "But they won't give me a vacation. I was sounding the editor on it day before yesterday. No; I'll have to manage somehow to swing the two together.

"Well, let's not talk shop now, Condyl. You need a rest. Do you want to play poker?"

They played for upward of an hour that evening, and Condyl, as usual, lost. His ill-luck was positively astonishing. During the last two months he had played poker with Blix on an average of three or four evenings in the week, and at the close of every game it was Blix who had all the chips.

Blix had come to know the game quite as well, if not better, than he. She could almost invariably tell when Condyl held a good hand, but on her part could assume an air of indifference absolutely inscrutable.

"Cards?" said Condyl, picking up the deck after the deal.

"I'll stand pat, Condyl."

"The deuce you say," he answered, with a stare. "I'll take three."

"I'll pass it up to you," continued Blix gravely.

"Well—well, I'll bet you five chips."

"Raise you twenty."

Condyl studied his hand, laid down the cards, picked them up again, scratched his head, and moved uneasily in his place. Then he threw down two high pairs.

"No," he said; "I won't see you. What did you have? Let's see, just for the fun of it."

Blix spread her cards on the table.

"Not a blessed thing!" exclaimed Condyl. "I might have known it. There's my last dollar gone, too. Lend me fifty cents, Blix."

Blix shook her head.

"Why, what a little niggard!" he exclaimed aggrievedly. "I'll pay them all back to you."

"Now, why should I lend you money to play against me? I'll not give you a chip; and, besides, I don't want to play any more. Let's stop."

"I've a mind to stop for good; stop playing even with you."

Blix gave a little cry of joy.

"Oh, Condyl, will you, could you? and never, never touch a card again? never play for money? I'd be so happy—but don't, unless you know you would keep your promise. I would much rather have you play every night, down there at your club, than break your promise."

Condyl fell silent, biting thoughtfully at the knuckle of a forefinger.

"Think twice about it, Condyl," urged Blix; "because this would be for always."

Condyl hesitated; then, abstractedly and as though speaking to himself:

"It's different now. Before we took that—three months ago, I don't say. It was harder for me to quit then, but now—well, everything is different now; and it would please you, Blixy!"

"More than anything else I can think of, Condyl."

He gave her his hand.

"That settles it," he said quietly. "I'll never gamble again, Blix."

Blix gripped his hand hard, then jumped up, and, with a quick breath of satisfaction, gathered up the cards and chips and flung them into the fireplace.

"Oh, I'm so glad that's over with," she exclaimed, her little eyes dancing. "I've pretended to like it, but I've hated it all the time. You don't know *how* I've hated it! What men can see in it to make them sit up all night long is beyond me. And you truly mean, Condyl, that

you never will gamble again? Yes, I know you mean it this time. Oh, I'm so happy I could sing!"

"Good Heavens, don't do that!" he cried quickly. "You're a nice, amiable girl, Blix, even if you're not pretty, and you——"

"Oh, bother you!" she retorted; "but you promise?"

"On my honour."

"That's enough," she said quietly.

But even when "loafing," as he was this evening, Condry could not rid himself of the thought and recollection of his novel; resting or writing, it haunted him. Otherwise he would not have been the story-writer that he was. From now on until he should set down the last sentence, the "thing" was never to let him alone, never to allow him a moment's peace. He could think of nothing else, could talk of nothing else; every faculty of his brain, every sense of observation or imagination incessantly concentrated themselves upon this one point.

As they sat in the bay window watching the moon rise, his mind was still busy with it, and he suddenly broke out:

"I ought to work some kind of a *treasure* into the yarn. What's a story of adventure without a treasure? By Jove, Blix, I wish I could give my whole time to this stuff! It's ripping good material, and it ought to be handled as carefully as glass. Ought to be worked up, you know."

"Condry," said Blix, looking at him intently, "what is it stands in your way of leaving the *Times*? Would they take you back if you left them long enough to write your novel? You could write it in a month, couldn't you, if you had nothing else to do? Suppose you left them for a month—would they hold your place for you?"

"Yes—yes, I think they would; but in the mean-

while, Blix—there's the rub. I've never saved a cent out of my salary. When I stop, my pay stops, and where-withal would I be fed? What are you looking for in that drawer—matches? Here, I've got a match."

Blix faced about at the sideboard, shutting the drawer by leaning against it. In both hands she held one of the delft sugar-bowls. She came up to the table, and emptied its contents upon the blue denim table-cover—two or three gold pieces, some fifteen silver dollars, and a handful of small change.

Disregarding all Condyl's inquiries, she counted it, making little piles of the gold and silver and nickel pieces.

"Thirty-five and seven is forty-two," she murmured, counting off on her fingers, "and six is forty-eight, and ten is fifty-eight, and ten is sixty-eight; and here is ten, twenty, thirty, fifty-five cents in change." She thrust it all toward him, across the table. "There," she said, "is your wherewithal."

Condy stared. "My wherewithal!" he muttered.

"It ought to be enough for over a month."

"Where did you get all that? Whose is it?"

"It's your money, Condy. You loaned it to me, and now it has come in very handy."

"I *loaned* it to you?"

"It's the money I won from you during the time you've been playing poker with me. You didn't know it would amount to so much, did you?"

"Pshaw, I'll not touch it!" he exclaimed, drawing back from the money as though it was red-hot.

"Yes, you will," she told him. "I've been saving it up for you, Condy, every penny of it, from the first day we played down there at the lake; and I always told myself that the moment you made up your mind to quit playing, I would give it back to you."

"Why, the very idea!" he vociferated, his hands deep

in his pockets, his face scarlet. "It's—it's preposterous, Blix! I won't let you *talk* about it even—I won't touch a nickel of that money. But, Blix, you're—you're—the finest woman I ever knew. You're a *man's* woman, that's what you are." He set his teeth. "If you loved a man, you'd be a regular pal to him; you'd back him up, you'd stand by him till the last gun was fired. I could do *anything* if a *woman* like you cared for me. Why, Blix, I—you haven't any idea——" He cleared his throat, stopping abruptly.

"But you must take this money," she answered; "*your* money. If you didn't, Condyl, it would make me out nothing more nor less than a gambler. I wouldn't have dreamed of playing cards with you if I had ever intended to keep one penny of your money. From the very start I intended to keep it for you, and give it back to you so soon as you would stop; and now you have a chance to put this money to a good use. You don't have to stay on the *Times* now. You can't do your novel justice while you are doing your hack work at the same time, and I do so want *In Defiance of Authority* to be a success. I've faith in you, Condyl. I know if you got the opportunity you would make a success."

"But you and I have played like two men playing," exclaimed Condyl. "How would it look if Sargeant, say, should give me back the money he had won from me? What a cad I would be to take it!"

"That's just it—we've not played like two men. Then I *would* have been a gambler. I've played with you because I thought it would make a way for you to break off with the habit; and knowing as I did how fond you were of playing cards and how bad it was for you, how wicked it would have been for me to have played with you in any other spirit! Don't you see? And as it has turned out, you've given up playing, and you've enough money to make it possible for you to

write your novel. The Centennial Company have asked you to try a story of adventure for them, you've found one that is splendid, you're just the man who could handle it, and now you've got the money to make it possible. Condyl," she exclaimed suddenly, "don't you see your *chance*? Aren't you a big enough man to see your chance when it comes? And, besides, do you think I would take *money* from you? Can't you understand? If you don't take this money that belongs to you, you would insult me. That is just the way I would feel about it. You must see that. If you care for me at all, you'll take it."

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The editor of the Sunday Supplement put his toothpick behind his ear and fixed Condyl with his eyeglasses.

"Well, it's like this, Rivers," he said. "Of course you know your own business best. If you stay on here with us, it will be all right. But I may as well tell you that I don't believe I can hold your place for a month. I can't get a man in here to do your work for just a month, and then fire him out at the end of that time. I don't like to lose you, but if you have an opportunity to get in on another paper during this vacation of yours, you're at liberty to do so, for all of me."

"Then you think my chance of coming back here would be pretty slim if I leave for a month now?"

"That's right."

There was a silence. Condyl hesitated; then he rose.

"I'll take the chance," he announced.

To Blix that evening, as he told her of the affair, he said:

"It's neck or nothing now, Blix."

CHAPTER XII

BUT did Blix care for him?

In the retired corner of his club, shut off by the Japanese screen, or going up and down the city to and from his work, or sitting with her in the bay window of the little dining room looking down upon the city, blurred in the twilight or radiant with the sunset, Condé asked himself the question. A score of times each day he came to a final, definite, negative decision; and a score of times reopened the whole subject. Beyond the fact that Blix had enjoyed herself in his company during the last months, Condé could find no sign or trace of encouragement; and for that matter he told himself that the indications pointed rather in the other direction. She had no compunction in leaving him to go away to New York, perhaps never to return. In less than a month now all their companionship was to end, and he would probably see the last of her.

He dared not let her know that at last he had really come to love her—that it was no pretence now; for he knew that with such declaration their “good times” would end even before she should go away. But every day, every hour that they were together made it harder for him to keep himself within bounds.

What with this trouble on his mind and the grim determination with which he held to his work, Condé changed rapidly. Blix had steadied him, and a certain earnestness and seriousness of purpose, a certain *strength* he had not known before, came swiftly into being.

Was Blix to go away, leave him, perhaps for all time,

and not know how much he cared? Would he speak before she went? Condyl did not know. It was a question that circumstances would help him to decide. He would not speak, so he resolved, unless he was sure that she cared herself; and if she did, she herself would give him a cue, a hint whereon to speak. But days went by, the time set for Blix's departure drew nearer and nearer, and yet she gave him not the slightest sign.

These two interests had now absorbed his entire life for the moment—his love for Blix, and his novel. Little by little *In Defiance of Authority* took shape. The boom restaurant and the club of the exiles were disposed of, Billy Isham began to come to the front, the filibustering expedition and Señora Estrada (with her torn calling card) had been introduced, and the expedition was ready to put to sea. But here a new difficulty was encountered.

"What do I know about ships?" Condyl confessed to Blix. "If Billy Isham is going to command a filibustering schooner, I've got to know something about a schooner—appear to, anyhow. I've got to know nautical lingo, the *real* thing, you know. I don't believe a *real* sailor ever in his life said 'belay there,' or 'avast.' We'll have to go out and see Captain Jack; get some more technical detail."

This move was productive of the most delightful results. Captain Jack was all on fire with interest the moment that Condyl and Blix told him of the idea.

"An' you're going to put Billy Isham in a book. Well, strike me straight, that's a snorkin' good idea! I've always said that all Billy needed was a ticket seller an' an advance agent, an' he was a whole show in himself."

"We're going to send it East," said Blix, "as soon as it's finished, and have it published."

"Well, it ought to make prime readin', miss; an'

that's a good fetchin' title, *In Defiance of Authority*."

Regularly Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, Blix and Condý came out to the life-boat station. Captain Jack received them in sweater and visored cap, and ushered them into the front room.

"Well, how's the yarn getting on?" Captain Jack would ask.

Then Condý would read the last chapter while the Captain paced the floor, frowning heavily, smoking cigars, listening to every word. Condý told the story in the first person, as if Billy Isham's partner were narrating scenes and events in which he himself had moved. Condý called this protagonist "Burke Cassowan," and was rather proud of the name. But the Captain would none of it. Cassowan, the protagonist, was simply "Our Mug."

"Now," Condý would say, notebook in hand, "now, Cap., we've got down to Mazatlan. Now I want to sort of organize the expedition in this next chapter."

"I see, I see," Captain Jack would exclaim, interested at once. "Wait a bit till I take off my shoes. I can think better with my shoes off"; and having removed his shoes, he would begin to pace the room in his stocking feet, puffing fiercely on his cigar as he warmed to the tale, blowing the smoke out through either ear, gesturing savagely, his face flushed and his eyes kindling.

"Well, now, lessee. First thing Our Mug does when he gets to Mazatlan is to communicate his arrival to Señora Estrada—telegraphs, you know; and, by the way, have him use a cipher."

"What kind of cipher?"

"Count three letters on from the right letter, see. If you were spelling 'boat,' for instance, you would begin with an *e*, the third letter after *b*; then *r* for the *o*, *r* being the third letter from *o*. So you'd spell 'boat,' *erdw*; and Señora Estrada knows when she gets that

dispatch that she must count three letters *back* from each letter to get the right ones. Take now such a cipher word as *ulioh*. That means *rifle*. Count three letters back from each letter of *ulioh*, and it'll spell *rifle*. You can make up a lot of dispatches like that, just to have the thing look natural; savvy?"

"Out of sight!" muttered Condyl, making a note.

"Then Our Mug and Billy Isham start getting a crew. And Our Mug, he buys the sextant there in Mazatlan—the sextant, that got out of order and spoiled everything. Or, no; don't have it a sextant; have it a quadrant—an old-fashioned, ebony quadrant. Have Billy Isham buy it because it was cheap."

"How did it get out of order, Captain Jack?" inquired Blix. "That would be a good technical detail, wouldn't it, Condyl?"

"Well, it's like this. Our Mug an' Billy get a schooner that's so bally small that they have to do their cooking in the cabin; quadrant's on a rack over the stove, and the heat warps the joints, so when Our Mug takes his observation he gets fifty miles off his course and raises the land where the government forces are watching for him."

"And here's another point, Cap.," said Condyl. "We ought to work some kind of a treasure into this yarn; can't you think up something new and original in the way of a treasure? I don't want the old game of a buried chest of money. Let's have him get track of something that's worth a fortune—something novel."

"Yes, yes; I see the idea," answered the Captain, striding over the floor with great thuds of his stockinged feet. "Now, lessee; let me think." He began, rubbing all his hair the wrong way. "We want something new and queer, something that ain't ever been written up before. I tell you what! Here it is! Have Our Mug get wind of a little river schooner that sunk fifty years before

his time in one of the big South American rivers, during a flood—I heard of this myself. Schooner went down and was buried twenty feet under mud and sand; and since that time—you know how the big rivers act—the whole blessed course of the river has changed at that point, and that schooner is on dry land, or rather twenty feet under it, and as sound as the day she chartered.”

“Well?”

“Well, have it that when she sank she had aboard of her a cargo of five hundred cases of whiskey, prime stuff, seven thousand quart bottles, sealed up tight as drums. Now Our Mug—nor Billy Isham, either—they ain’t born yesterday. No, sir; they’re right next to themselves! They figure this way. This here whiskey’s been kept fifty years without being moved. Now, what do you suppose seven thousand quart bottles of fifty-year-old whiskey would be worth? Why, twenty dollars a quart wouldn’t be too fancy. So there you are; there’s your treasure. Our Mug and Billy Isham have only got to dig through twenty feet of sand to pick up a hundred thousand dollars, *if they can find the schooner.*”

Blix clapped her hands with a little cry of delight, and Condry smote a knee, exclaiming:

“By Jove! that’s as good as Loudon Dodds’ opium ship! Why, Cap., you’re a treasure in yourself for a fellow looking for stories.”

Then after the notes were taken and the story talked over, Captain Jack, especially if the day happened to be Sunday, would insist upon their staying to dinner—boiled beef and cabbage, smoking coffee and pickles—that K. D. B. served in the little, brick-paved kitchen in the back of the station. The crew messed in their quarters overhead.

K. D. B. herself was not uninteresting. Her respectability encased her like armour plate, and she never

laughed without putting three fingers to her lips. She told them that she had at one time been a "costume reader."

"A costume reader?"

"Yes; reading extracts from celebrated authors in the appropriate costume of the character. It used to pay very well, and it was very refined. I used to do 'In a Balcony,' by Mister Browning, and 'Laska,' the same evening, and it always made a hit. I'd do 'In a Balcony,' first, and I'd put on a Louis-Quinze-the-fifteenth gown and wig-to-match over a female cowboy outfit. When I'd finished 'In a Balcony,' I'd do an exit, and shunt the gown and wig-to-match, and come on as 'Laska,' with thunder noises off. It was one of the strongest effects in my repertoire, and it always got me a curtain call."

And Captain Jack would wag his head and murmur: "Extraordinary! extraordinary!"

Blix and Condý soon noted that upon the occasion of each one of their visits, K. D. B. found means to entertain them at great length with long discussions upon certain subjects of curiously diversified character. Upon their first visit she elected to talk upon the Alps mountains. The Sunday following it was bacteriology; on the next Wednesday it was crystals; while for two hours during their next visit to the station, Condý and Blix were obliged to listen to K. D. B.'s interminable discourse on the origin, history, and development of the kingdom of Denmark. Condý was dumbfounded.

"I never met such a person, man or woman, in all my life. Talk about education! Why, I think she knows everything!"

In Defiance of Authority soon began to make good progress, but Condý, once launched upon technical navigation, must have Captain Jack at his elbow continually, to keep him from foundering. In some sea

novel he remembered to have come across the expression "garboard streak," and from the context guessed it was to be applied to a detail of a vessel's construction. In an unguarded moment he had written that his schooner's name "was painted in showy gilt letters upon her garboard streak."

"What's the garboard streak, Condyl?" Blix had asked, when he had read the chapter to her.

"That's where they paint her name," he declared promptly. "I don't know exactly, but I like the sound of it."

But the next day, when he was reading this same chapter to Captain Jack, the latter suddenly interrupted with an exclamation as of acute physical anguish.

"What's that? Read that last over again," he demanded.

"When they had come within a few boats' lengths,'" read Condyl, "'they were able to read the schooner's name, painted in showy gilt letters upon her garboard streak.'"

"My God!" gasped the Captain, clasping his head. Then, with a shout: "Garboard streak! garboard streak! Don't you know that the garboard streak is the last plank next the keel? You mean *counter*, not garboard streak. That regularly gravelled me, that did!"

They stayed to dinner with the couple that afternoon, and for half an hour afterward K. D. B. told them of the wonders of the caves of Elephanta. One would have believed that she had actually been at the place. But when she changed the subject to the science of fortification, Blix could no longer restrain herself.

"But it is really wonderful that you should know all these things! Where *did* you find time to study so much?"

"One must have an education," returned K. D. B. primly.

But Condyl had caught sight of a half-filled bookshelf against the opposite wall, and had been suddenly smitten with an inspiration. On a leaf of his notebook he wrote: "Try her on the G's and H's," and found means to show it furtively to Blix. But Blix was puzzled, and at the earliest opportunity Condyl himself said to the retired costume reader:

"Speaking of fortifications, Mrs. Hoskins, Gibraltar now—that's a wonderful rock, isn't it?"

"Rock!" she queried. "I thought it was an island."

"Oh, no; it's a fortress. They have a castle there—a castle, something like—well, like the old Schloss at Heidelberg. Did you ever hear about or read about Heidelberg University?"

But K. D. B. was all abroad now. Gibraltar and Heidelberg were unknown subjects to her as were also inoculation, Japan, and Kosciusko. Above the H's she was sound; below that point her ignorance was benighted.

"But what is it, Condyl?" demanded Blix, as soon as they were alone.

"I've the idea," he answered, chuckling. "Wait till after Sunday to see if I'm right; then I'll tell you. It's a dollar to a paper dime, K. D. B. will have something for us by Sunday, beginning with an I."

And she had. It was Internal Revenue.

"Right! right!" Condyl shouted gleefully, as he and Blix were on their way home. "I knew it. She's done with Ash—Bol, Bol—Car, and all those, and has worked through Cod—Dem, and Dem—Eve. She's down to Hor—Kin now, and she'll go through the whole lot before she's done: Kin—Mag, Mag—Mot, Mot—Pal, and all the rest."

"The Encyclopædia?"

"Don't you see it? No wonder she didn't know beans

about Gibraltar! She hadn't come to the G's by then."

"She's reading the *Encyclopædia*."

"And she gets the volumes on the instalment plan, don't you see? Reads the heading articles, and then springs 'em on us. To know things and talk about 'em, that's her idea of being cultured. 'One must have an education.' Do you remember her saying that? Oh, our matrimonial objects are panning out beyond all expectation!"

What a delicious, never-to-be-forgotten month it was for those two! There in the midst of life they were as much alone as upon a tropic island. Blix had deliberately freed herself from a world that had grown distasteful to her; Condylittle by little had dropped away from his place among the men and the women of his acquaintance, and the two came and went together, living in a little world of their own creation, happy in each other's society, living only in the present, and asking nothing better than to be left alone and to their own devices.

They saw each other every day. In the morning from nine till twelve, and in the afternoon until three, Condyl worked away upon his novel; but not an evening passed that did not see him and Blix in the dining room of the little flat. Thursdays and Sunday afternoons they visited the life-boat station, and at other times prowled about the unfrequented corners of the city, now passing an afternoon along the water-front, watching the departure of a China steamer or the loading of the great, steel wheat-ships; now climbing the ladder-like streets of Telegraph Hill, or revisiting the Plaza, Chinatown, and the restaurant; or taking long walks in the Presidio Reservation, watching cavalry and artillery drills; or sitting for hours on the rocks by the seashore, watching the ceaseless roll and plunge of the surf, the wheeling sea-birds, and the sleek-headed seals hunting

the off-shore fish, happy for a half-hour when they surprised one with his prey in his teeth.

One day, some three weeks before the end of the year, toward two in the afternoon, Condry sat in his usual corner of the club, behind the screen, writing rapidly. His coat was off and the stump of a cigar was between his teeth. At his elbow was the rectangular block of his manuscript. During the last week the story had run from him with a facility that had surprised and delighted him; words came to him without effort, ranging themselves into line with the promptitude of well-drilled soldiery; sentences and paragraphs marched down the clean-swept spaces of his paper like companies and platoons defiling upon review; his chapters were brigades that he marshalled at will, falling them in one behind the other, each preceded by its chapter head, like an officer in the space between two divisions. In the guise of a commander-in-chief sitting his horse upon an eminence that overlooked the field of operations, Condry at last took in the entire situation at a glance, and, with the force and precision of a machine, marched his forces straight to the goal he had set for himself so long a time before.

Then at length he took a fresh penful of ink, squared his elbows, drew closer to the desk, and with a single swift spurt of the pen wrote the last line of his novel, dropping the pen upon the instant and pressing the blotter over the words as though setting a seal of approval upon the completed task.

"There!" he muttered, between his teeth; "I've done for *you*!"

That same afternoon he read the last chapter to Blix, and she helped him to prepare the manuscript for expressage. She insisted that it should go off that very day, and herself wrote the directions upon the outside wrapper. Then the two went down together to the Wells

Fargo office, and *In Defiance of Authority* was sent on its journey across the continent.

"Now," she said, as they came out of the express office and stood for a moment upon the steps, "now there's nothing to do but wait for the Centennial Company. I do so hope we'll get their answer before I go away. They *ought* to take it. It's just what they asked for. Don't you think they'll take it, Condyl?"

"Oh, bother that!" answered Condyl. "I don't care whether they take it or not. How long now is it before you go, Blix?"

CHAPTER XIII

A WEEK passed; then another. The year was coming to a close. In ten days Blix would be gone. Letters had been received from Aunt Kihm, and also an exquisite black leather travelling-case, a present to her niece, full of cut-glass bottles, ebony-backed brushes, and shell combs. Blix was to leave on the second day of January. In the meanwhile she had been reading far into her first-year text-books, underscoring and annotating, studying for hours upon such subjects as she did not understand, so that she might get hold of her work the readier when it came to classroom routine and lectures. Hers was a temperament admirably suited to the study she had chosen—self-reliant, cool, and robust.

But it was not easy for her to go. Never before had Blix been away from her home; never for longer than a week had she been separated from her father, nor from Howard and Snooky. That huge city upon the Atlantic seaboard, with its vast, fierce life, where beat the heart of the nation, and where beyond Aunt Kihm she knew no friend, filled Blix with a vague sense of terror and of oppression. She was going out into a new life, a life of work and of study, a harsher life than she had yet known. Her father, her friends, her home—all these were to be left behind. It was not surprising that Blix should be daunted at the prospect of so great a change in her life, now so close at hand. But if the tears did start at times, no one ever saw them fall, and with a courage that was all her own Blix watched the last days of the year trooping past, and the approach of the New Year that was to begin the new life.

But Condyl was thoroughly unhappy. Those wonderful three months were at an end. Blix was going. In less than a week now she would be gone. He would see the last of her. Then what? He pictured himself—when he had said good-bye to her and the train had lessened to a smoky blur in the distance—facing about, facing the life that must then begin for him, returning to the city alone, picking up the routine again. There would be nothing to look forward to then; he would not see Blix in the afternoon; would not sit with her in the evening in the little dining room of the flat overlooking the city and the bay; would not wake in the morning with the consciousness that before the sun would set he would see her again, be with her, and hear the sound of her voice. The months that were to follow would be one long ache, one long, harsh, colourless grind without her. How was he to get through that first evening that he must pass alone? And she did not care for him. Condyl at last knew this to be so. Even the poor solace of knowing that she, too, was unhappy was denied him. She had never loved him, and never would. He was a chum to her, nothing more. Condyl was too clear-headed to deceive himself upon this point. The time was come for her to go away, and she had given him no sign, no cue.

The last days passed; Blix's trunk was packed, her half section engaged, her ticket bought. They said good-bye to the old places they had come to know so well—Chinatown, the Golden Balcony, the water-front, the lake of San Andreas, Telegraph Hill, and Luna's—and had bidden farewell to Ricardo and to old Richardson. They had left K. D. B. and Captain Jack until the last day. Blix was to go on the second of January. On New Year's Day she and Condyl were to take their last walk, were to go out to the life-boat station, and then on around the shore to the little amphitheatre of

blackberry bushes—where they had promised always to write one another on the anniversary of their first visit—and then for the last time climb the hill, and go across the breezy downs to the city.

Then came the last day of the old year, the last day but one that they would be together. They spent it in a long ramble along the water-front, following the line of the shipping even as far as Meiggs's wharf. They had come back to the flat for supper, and afterward, as soon as the family had left them alone, had settled themselves in the bay window to watch the New Year in.

The little dining room was dark but for the indistinct blur of light that came in through the window—a light that was a mingling of the afterglow, the new-risen moon, and the faint haze that the city threw off into the sky from its street lamps and electrics. From where they sat they could look down, almost as from a tower, into the city's streets. Here a corner came into view; farther on a great puff of green foliage—palms and pines side by side—overlooked a wall. Here a street was visible for almost its entire length, like a stream of asphalt flowing down the pitch of the hill, dammed on either side by rows upon rows of houses; while farther on the vague confusion of roofs and façades opened out around a patch of green lawn, the garden of some larger residence.

As they looked and watched, the afterglow caught window after window, till all that quarter of the city seemed to stare up at them from a thousand ruddy eyes. The windows seemed infinite in number, the streets endless in their complications; yet everything was deserted. At this hour the streets were empty, and would remain so until daylight. Not a soul was stirring; no face looked from any of those myriads of glowing windows; no footfall disturbed the silence of those asphalt streets. There, almost within call behind those

windows, shut off from those empty streets, a thousand human lives were teeming, each the centre of its own circle of thoughts and words and actions; and yet the solitude was profound, the desolation complete, the stillness unbroken by a single echo.

The night—the last night of the old year—was fine; the white, clear light from a moon they could not see grew wide and clear over the city, as the last gleam of the sunset faded. It was just warm enough for the window to be open, and for nearly three hours Condyl and Blix sat looking down upon the city in these last moments of the passing year, feeling upon their faces an occasional touch of the breeze, that carried with it the smell of trees and flowers from the gardens below them, and the faint, fine taint of the ocean from far out beyond the Heads. But the scene was not in reality silent. At times when they listened intently, especially when they closed their eyes, there came to them a subdued, steady bourdon, profound, unceasing, a vast, numb murmur, like no other sound in all the gamut of nature—the sound of a city at night, the hum of a great, conglomerate life, wrought out there from moment to moment under the stars and under the moon, while the last hours of the old year dropped quietly away.

A star fell.

Sitting in the window, the two noticed it at once, and Condyl stirred for the first time in fifteen minutes.

"That was a very long one," he said, in a low voice. "Blix, you must write to me—we must write each other often."

"Oh, yes," she answered. "We must not forget each other; we have had too good a time for that."

"Four years is a long time," he went on. "Lots can happen in four years. Wonder what I'll be doing at the end of four years? We've had a pleasant time while it lasted, Blix."

"Haven't we?" she said, her chin on her hand, the moonlight shining in her little, dark-brown eyes.

Well, he was going to lose her. He had found out that he loved her only in time to feel the wrench of parting from her all the more keenly. What was he to do with himself after she was gone? What could he turn to in order to fill up the great emptiness that her going would leave in his daily life? And was she never to know how dear she was to him? Why not speak to her, why not tell her that he loved her? But Condyl knew that Blix did not love him, and the knowledge of that must keep him silent; he must hug his secret to him, like the Spartan boy with his stolen fox, no matter how grievously it hurt him to do so. He and Blix had lived through two months of rarest, most untroubled happiness, with hardly more self-consciousness than two young and healthy boys. To bring that troublous, disquieting element of love between them—unrequited love, of all things—would be a folly. She would tell him—must in all honesty tell him that she did not love him, and all their delicious *camaraderie* would end in a "scene." Condyl, above everything, wished to look back on those two months, after she had gone, without being able to remember therein one single note that jarred. If the memory of her was all that he was to have, he resolved that at least that memory should be perfect.

And the love of her had made a man of him—he could not forget that; had given to him just the strength that made it possible for him to keep that resolute, grim silence now. In those two months he had grown five years; he was more masculine, more virile. The very set of his mouth was different; between the eyebrows the cleft had deepened; his voice itself vibrated to a heavier note. No, no; so long as he should live, he, man grown as he was, could never forget this girl of nineteen who had come into his life so quietly, so unexpectedly, who

had influenced it so irresistibly and so unmistakably for its betterment, and who had passed out of it with the passing of the year.

For a few moments Condyl had been absent-mindedly snapping the lid of his cigarette case, while he thought; now he selected a cigarette, returned the case to his pocket, and fumbled for a match. But the little gun-metal safe he carried was empty. Blix rose and groped for a moment upon the mantel-shelf, then returned and handed him a match, and stood over him while he scraped it under the arm of the chair wherein he sat. Even when his cigarette was lit she still stood there, looking at him, the fingers of her hands clasped in front of her, her hair, one side of her cheek, her chin, and sweet, round neck outlined by the faint blur of light that came from the open window. Then quietly she said:

"Well, Condyl?"

"Well, Blix?"

"Just 'well?'" she repeated. "Is that all? Is that all you have to say to me?"

He gave a great start.

"Blix!" he exclaimed.

"Is that all? And you are going to let me go away from you for so long, and say nothing more than that to me? You think you have been so careful, think you have kept your secret so close! Condyl, don't you suppose I know? Do you suppose women are so blind? No, you don't need to tell me; I know, I've known it—oh, for weeks!"

"You know—know—know what?" he exclaimed, breathless.

"That you have been pretending that you did not love me. I know that you do love me—I know you have been trying to keep it from me for fear it would spoil our good times, and because we had made up our minds to be chums, and have 'no more foolishness.'

Once—in those days when we first knew each other—I knew you did not love me when you said you did; but now, since—oh, since that afternoon in the Chinese restaurant, remember?—I’ve known that you did love me, although you pretended you didn’t. It was the pretence I wanted to be rid of; I wanted to be rid of it when you said you loved me and didn’t, and I want to be rid of it now when you pretend *not* to love me and I *know* you do,” and Blix leaned back her head as she spoke that “know,” looking at him from under her lids, a smile upon her lips. “It’s the pretence that I won’t have,” she added. “We must be sincere with each other, you and I.”

“Blix, do *you* love *me*?”

Condy had risen to his feet, his breath was coming quick, his cigarette was flung away, and his hands opened and shut swiftly.

“Oh, Blix, little girl, do *you* love *me*?”

They stood there for a moment in the half dark, facing one another, their hearts beating, their breath failing them in the tension of the instant. There in that room, high above the city, a little climax had come swiftly to a head, a crisis in two lives had suddenly developed. The moment that had been in preparation for the last few months, the last few years, the last few centuries, behold! it had arrived.

“Blix, do you love me?”

Suddenly it was the New Year. Somewhere close at hand a chorus of chiming church bells sang together. Far off in the direction of the wharves, where the great ocean steamships lay, came the glad, sonorous shouting of a whistle; from a near-by street a bugle called aloud. And then from point to point, from street to roof top, and from roof to spire, the vague murmur of many sounds grew and spread and widened, slowly, grandly; that profound and steady bourdon, as of an invisible

organ swelling, deepening, and expanding to the full male diapason of the city aroused and signalling the advent of another year.

And they heard it, they two heard it, standing there face to face, looking into each other's eyes, that unanswered question yet between them, the question that had come to them with the turning of the year. It was the old year yet when Condyl had asked that question. In that moment's pause, while Blix hesitated to answer him, the New Year had come. And while the huge, vast note of the city swelled and vibrated, she still kept silent. But only for a moment. Then she came closer to him, and put a hand on each of his shoulders.

"Happy New Year, dear," she said.

On New Year's Day, the last day they were to be together, Blix and Condyl took "their walk," as they had come to call it—the walk that included the life-boat station, the Golden Gate, the ocean beach beyond the old fort, the green, bare, flower-starred hills and downs, and the smooth levels of the golf links. Blix had been busy with the last details of her packing, and they did not get started until toward two in the afternoon.

"Strike me!" exclaimed Captain Jack, as Blix informed him that she had come to say good-bye. "Why, ain't this very sudden-like, Miss Bessemer? Hey, Kitty, come in here. Here's Miss Bessemer come to say good-bye; going to New York to-morrow."

"We'll regularly be lonesome without you, miss," said K. D. B., as she came into the front room, bringing with her a brisk, pungent odour of boiled vegetables. "New York—such a town as it must be! It was called Manhattan at first, you know, and was settled by the Dutch."

Evidently K. D. B. had reached the N's.

With such deftness as she possessed, Blix tried to turn the conversation upon the first meeting of the retired sea captain and the one-time costume reader, but all to

no purpose. The "Matrimonial Objects" were perhaps a little ashamed of their "personals" by now, and neither Blix nor Condyl was ever to hear their version of the meeting in the back dining room of Luna's Mexican restaurant. Captain Jack was, in fact, anxious to change the subject.

"Any news of the yarn yet?" he suddenly inquired of Condyl. "What do those Eastern publishin' people think of Our Mug and Billy Isham and the whiskey schooner?"

Condyl had received the rejected manuscript of *In Defiance of Authority* that morning, accompanied by a letter from the Centennial Company.

"Well," he said in answer, "they're not, as you might say, falling over themselves trying to see who'll be the first to print it. It's been returned."

"The devil you say!" responded the Captain. "Well, that's kind of disappointin' to you, ain't it?"

"But," Blix hastened to add, "we're not at all discouraged. We're going to send it off again right away."

Then she said good-bye to them.

"I dunno as you'll see me here when you come back, miss," said the Captain, at the gate, his arm around K. D. B. "I've got to schemin' again. Do you know," he added, in a low, confidential tone, "that all the mines in California send their clean-ups and gold bricks down to the Selby smeltin' works once every week? They send 'em to San Francisco first, and they are taken up to Selby's Wednesday afternoons on a little stern-wheel steamer called the *Monticello*. All them bricks are in a box—dumped in like so much coal—and that box sets just under the wheel-house, for'ard. How much money do you suppose them bricks represent? Well, I'll tell you; last week they represented seven hundred and eighty thousand dollars. Well, now, I got a chart of the bay near Vallejo; the channel's all right, but there are

mud-flats that run out from shore three miles. Enough water for a whitehall, but not enough for—well, for the patrol boat, for instance. Two or three slick boys, of a foggy night—of course, I'm not in that kind of game, but strike! it would be a deal now, wouldn't it?"

"Don't you believe him, miss," put in K. D. B. "He's just talking to show off."

"I think your scheme of holding up a Cunard liner," said Condry, with great earnestness, "is more feasible. You could lay across her course and fly a distress signal. She'd have to heave to."

"Yes, I been thinkin' o' that; but look here—what's to prevent the liner taking right after your schooner after you've got the stuff aboard—just followin' you right around an' findin' out where you land?"

"She'd be under contract to carry government mails," contradicted Condry. "She couldn't do that. You'd leave her mails aboard for just that reason. You wouldn't rob her of her mails; just so long as she was carrying government mails she couldn't stop."

The Captain clapped his palm down upon the gatepost.

"Strike me straight! I never thought of that."

CHAPTER XIV

BLIX and Condyl went on; on along the narrow road upon the edge of the salt marshes and *tules* that lay between the station and the Golden Gate; on to the Golden Gate itself, and around the old rime-encrusted fort to the ocean shore, with its reaches of hard, white sand, where the boulders lay tumbled and the surf grumbled incessantly.

The world seemed very far away from them there on the shores of the Pacific, on that first afternoon of the New Year. They were supremely happy, and they sufficed to themselves. Condyl had forgotten all about the next day, when he must say good-bye to Blix. It did not seem possible, it was not within the bounds of possibility, that she was to go away—that they two were to be separated. And for that matter, to-morrow was to-morrow. It was twenty-four hours away. The present moment was sufficient.

The persistence with which they clung to the immediate moment, their happiness in living only in the the present, had brought about a rather curious condition of things between them.

In their love for each other there was no thought of marriage; they were too much occupied with the joy of being together at that particular instant to think of the future. They loved each other, and that was enough. They did not look ahead further than the following day, and then but furtively, and only in order that their morrow's parting might intensify their happiness of to-day. That New Year's Day was to be the end of everything. Blix was going; she and Condyl would never see each other again. The thought of marriage—with

its certain responsibilities, its duties, its gravity, its vague, troublous seriousness, its inevitable disappointments—was even a little distasteful to them. Their romance had been hitherto without a flaw; they had been genuinely happy in little things. It was as well that it should end that day, in all its pristine sweetness, unsullied by a single bitter moment, undimmed by the cloud of a single disillusion or disappointment. Whatever chanced to them in later years, they could at least cherish this one memory of a pure, unselfish affection, young and unstained and almost without thought of sex, come and gone on the very threshold of their lives. This was the end, they both understood. They were glad that it was to be so. They did not even speak again of writing to each other.

They found once more the little semicircle of blackberry bushes and the fallen log, halfway up the hill above the shore, and sat there awhile, looking down upon the long green rollers, marching incessantly toward the beach, and there breaking in a prolonged explosion of solid green water and flying spume. And their glance followed their succeeding ranks farther and farther out to sea, till the multitude blended into the mass—the vast, green, shifting mass that drew the eye on and on, to the abrupt, fine line of the horizon.

There was no detail in the scene. There was nothing but the great reach of the ocean floor, the unbroken plane of blue sky, and the bare green slope of land—three immensities, gigantic, vast, primordial. It was no place for trivial ideas and thoughts of little things. The mind harked back unconsciously to the broad, simpler, basic emotions, the fundamental instincts of the race. The huge spaces of earth and air and water carried with them a feeling of kindly but enormous force—elemental force, fresh, untutored, new, and young. There was buoyancy in it; a fine, breathless sense of uplifting and

exhilaration; a sensation as of bigness and a return to the homely, human, natural life, to the primitive old impulses, irresistible, changeless, and unhampered; old as the ocean, stable as the hills, vast as the unplumbed depths of the sky.

Condy and Blix sat still, listening, looking, and watching—the intellect drowsy and numb; the emotions, the senses, all alive and brimming to the surface. Vaguely they felt the influence of the moment. Something was preparing for them. From the lowest, untouched depths in the hearts of each of them something was rising steadily to consciousness and the light of day. There is no name for such things, no name for the mystery that spans the interval between man and woman—the mystery that bears no relation to their love for each other, but that is something better than love, and whose coming savours of the miraculous.

The afternoon had waned and the sun had begun to set when Blix rose.

“We should be going, Condy,” she told him.

They started up the hill, and Condy said: “I feel as though I had been somehow asleep with my eyes wide open. What a glorious sunset! It seems to me as though I were living double every minute; and, oh! Blix, isn’t it the greatest thing in the world to love each other as we do?”

They had come to the top of the hill by now, and went on across the open, breezy downs, all starred with blue iris and wild heliotrope. Blix drew his arm about her waist, and laid her cheek upon his shoulder with a little caressing motion.

“And I do love you, dear,” she said,—“love you with all my heart. And it’s for always, too; I know that. I’ve been a girl until within the last three or four days—just a girl, dearest; not very serious, I’m afraid, and not caring for anything else beyond what was happening

close around me—don't you understand? But since I've found out how much I loved you and knew that you loved me—why, everything is changed for me. I'm not the same, I enjoy things that I never thought of enjoying before, and I feel so—oh, *larger*, don't you know?—and stronger, and so much more serious. Just a little while ago I was only nineteen, but I think, dear, that by loving you I have become—all of a sudden and without knowing it—a woman."

A little trembling ran through her with the words. She stopped and put both arms around his neck, her head tipped back, her eyes half closed, her sweet yellow hair rolling from her forehead. Her whole dear being radiated with that sweet, clean perfume that seemed to come alike from her clothes, her neck, her arms, her hair, and mouth—the delicious, almost divine, feminine aroma that was part of herself.

"You do love me, Condy, don't you, just as I love you?"

Such words as he could think of seemed pitifully inadequate. For answer he could only hold her the closer. She understood. Her eyes closed slowly, and her face drew nearer to his. Just above a whisper, she said:

"I love you, dear!"

"I love you, Blix!"

And they kissed each other then upon the mouth.

Meanwhile the sun had been setting. Such a sunset! The whole world, the three great spaces of sea and land and sky, were incarnadined with the glory of it. The ocean floor was a blinding red radiance, the hills were amethyst, the sky one gigantic opal, and they two seemed poised in the midst of all the chaotic glory of a primitive world. It was New Year's Day; the earth was new, the year was new, and their love was new and strong. Everything was before them. There was no longer any past, no longer any present. Regrets and

memories had no place in their new world. It was Hope, Hope, Hope, that sang to them and called to them and smote into life the new keen blood of them.

Then suddenly came the miracle, like the flashing out of a new star, whose radiance they felt but could not see, like a burst of music whose harmony they felt but could not hear. And as they stood there alone in all that simple glory of sky and earth and sea, they knew all in an instant that *they were for each other*, forever and forever, for better or for worse, till death should them part. Into their romance, into their world of little things, their joys of the moment, their happiness of the hour, had suddenly descended a great and lasting joy, the happiness of the great, grave issues of life—a happiness so deep, so intense, as to thrill them with a sense of solemnity and wonder. Instead of being the end, that New Year's Day was but the beginning—the beginning of their real romance. All the fine, virile, masculine energy of him was aroused and rampant. All her sweet, strong womanliness had been suddenly deepened and broadened. In fine, he had become a man, and she a woman. Youth, life, and the love of man and woman, the strength of the hills, the depth of the ocean, and the beauty of the sky at sunset; that was what the New Year had brought to them

“It's good-bye, dear, isn't it?” said Blix.

But Condry would not have it so.

“No, no,” he told her; “no, Blix; no matter how often we separate after this wonderful New Year's Day, no matter how far we are apart, *we* two shall never, never say good-bye.”

“Oh, you're right, you're right!” she answered, the tears beginning to shine in her little dark-brown eyes. “No; so long as we love each other, nothing matters. There's no such thing as distance for us, is there? Just

think, you will be here on the shores of the Pacific, and I on the shores of the Atlantic, but the whole continent can't come between us."

"And we'll be together again, Blix," he said; "and it won't be very long now. Just give me time—a few years now."

"But so long as we love each other, *time* won't matter, either."

"What are the tears for, Blixy?" he asked, pressing his handkerchief to her cheek.

"Because this is the saddest and happiest day of my life," she answered. Then she pulled from him with a little laugh, adding: "Look, Condyl, you've dropped your letter. You pulled it out just now with your handkerchief."

As Condyl picked it up, she noted the name of the Centennial Company upon the corner.

"It's the letter I got with the manuscript of the novel when they sent it back," he explained.

"What did they say?"

"Oh, the usual thing. I haven't read it yet. Here's what they say." He opened it and read:

We return to you herewith the MS. of your novel, *In Defiance of Authority*, and regret that our reader does not recommend it as available for publication at present. We have, however, followed your work with considerable interest, and have read a story by you, copied in one of our exchanges, under the title, "A Victory Over Death," which we would have been glad to publish ourselves, had you given us the chance.

Would you consider the offer of the assistant editorship of our *Quarterly*, a literary and critical pamphlet, that we publish in New York, and with which we presume you are familiar? We do not believe there would be any difficulty in the matter of financial arrangements. In case you should decide to come on, we enclose R. R. passes *via* the A. T. & S. F. C., & A., and New York Central.

Very truly,

THE CENTENNIAL PUBLISHING CO.

NEW YORK.

The two exchanged glances. But Blix was too excited to speak, and could only give vent to a little, quivering, choking sigh. The letter was a veritable god from the machine, the one thing lacking to complete their happiness.

"I don't know how this looks to *you*," Condyl began, trying to be calm, "but it seems to me that this is—that this—this——"

But what they said then, they could never afterward remember. The golden haze of the sunset somehow got into their recollection of the moment, and they could only recall the fact that they had been gayer in that moment than ever before in all their lives.

Perhaps as gay as they ever were to be again. They began to know the difference between gayety and happiness. That New Year's Day, that sunset, marked for them an end and a beginning. It was the end of their gay, irresponsible, hour-to-hour life of the past three months; and it was the beginning of a new life, whose possibilities of sorrow and of trouble, of pleasure and of happiness, were greater than aught they had yet experienced. They knew this—they felt it instinctively, as with a common impulse they turned and looked back upon the glowing earth and sea and sky, the breaking surf, the beach, the distant, rime-encrusted, ancient fort—all that scene that to their eyes stood for the dear, free, careless companionship of those last few months. Their new-found happiness was not without its sadness already. All was over now; their solitary walks, the long, still evenings in the little dining room overlooking the sleeping city, their excursions to Luna's, their afternoons spent in the golden Chinese balcony, their mornings on the lake, calm and still and hot. Forever and forever they had said good-bye to that life. Already the sunset was losing its glory.

Then, with one last look, they turned about and set

their faces from it to the new life, to the East, where lay the Nation. Out beyond the purple bulwarks of the Sierras, far off, the great, grim world went clashing through its grooves—the world that now they were to know, the world that called to them, and woke them, and roused them. Their little gayeties were done; the life of little things was all behind. Now for the future. The sterner note had struck—work was to be done; that, too, the New Year had brought to them—work for each of them, work and the world of men.

For a moment they shrank from it, loath to take the first step beyond the confines of the garden wherein they had lived so joyously and learned to love each other; and as they stood there, facing the gray and darkening Eastern sky, their backs forever turned to the sunset, Blix drew closer to him, putting her hand in his, looking a little timidly into his eyes. But his arm was around her, and the strong young force that looked into her eyes from his gave her courage.

“A happy New Year, dear,” she said.

“A very, very happy New Year, Blix,” he answered.

THE END

MORAN OF THE LADY LETTY

DEDICATED TO
CAPT. HODGSON

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MORAN OF THE LADY LETTY

CHAPTER I

SHANGHAIED

THIS is to be a story of a battle, at least one murder, and several sudden deaths. For that reason it begins with a pink tea and among the mingled odours of many delicate perfumes and the hale, frank smell of Caroline Testout roses.

There had been a great number of *débutantes* "coming out" that season in San Francisco by means of afternoon teas, pink, lavender, and otherwise. This particular tea was intended to celebrate the fact that Josie Herrick had arrived at that time of her life when she was to wear her hair high and her gowns long, and to have a "day" of her own quite distinct from that of her mother.

Ross Wilbur presented himself at the Herrick house on Pacific Avenue much too early upon the afternoon of Miss Herrick's tea. As he made his way up the canvased stairs he was aware of a terrifying array of millinery and a disquieting staccato chatter of feminine voices in the parlours and reception rooms on either side of the hallway. A single high hat in the room that had been set apart for the men's use confirmed him in his suspicions.

"Might have known it would be a hen party till six, anyhow," he muttered, swinging out of his overcoat.

"Bet I don't know one girl in twenty down there now—all Mamma's friends at this hour, and Papa's maiden sisters, and Jo's school-teachers and governesses and music teachers, and I don't know what all."

When he went down he found it precisely as he expected. He went up to Miss Herrick, where she stood receiving with her mother and two of the other girls, and allowed them to chaff him on his forlornness.

"Maybe I seem at my ease," said Ross Wilbur to them, "but really I am very much frightened. I'm going to run away as soon as it is decently possible, even before, unless you feed me."

"I believe you had luncheon not two hours ago," said Miss Herrick. "Come along, though, and I'll give you some chocolate, and perhaps, if you're good, a stuffed olive. I got them just because I knew you liked them. I ought to stay here and receive, so I can't look after you for long."

The two fought their way through the crowded rooms to the luncheon-table, and Miss Herrick got Wilbur his chocolate and his stuffed olives. They sat down and talked in a window recess for a moment, Wilbur toeing-in in absurd fashion as he tried to make a lap for his plate.

"I thought," said Miss Herrick, "that you were going on the Ridgeways' yachting party this afternoon. Mrs. Ridgeway said she was counting on you. They are going out with the *Petrel*."

"She didn't count above a hundred, though," answered Wilbur. "I got your bid first, so I regretted the yachting party; and I guess I'd have regretted it anyhow," and he grinned at her over his cup.

"Nice man," she said, adding on the instant, "I must go now, Ross."

"Wait till I eat the sugar out of my cup," complained Wilbur. "Tell me," he added, scraping vigorously at

the bottom of the cup with the inadequate spoon; "tell me, you're going to the hoe-down to-night?"

"If you mean the Assembly, yes, I am."

"Will you give me the first and last?"

"I'll give you the first, and you can ask for the last then."

"Let's put it down; I know you'll forget it." Wilbur drew a couple of cards from his case.

"Programmes are not good form any more," said Miss Herrick.

"Forgetting a dance is worse."

He made out the cards, writing on the one he kept for himself, "First waltz—Jo."

"I must go back now," said Miss Herrick, getting up.

"In that case I shall run—I'm afraid of girls."

"It's a pity about you."

"I am; one girl, I don't say, but girl in the aggregate like this," and he pointed his chin toward the thronged parlours. "It unmans me."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye, until to-night, about——?"

"About nine."

"About nine, then."

Ross Wilbur made his adieu to Mrs. Herrick and the girls who were receiving, and took himself away. As he came out of the house and stood for a moment on the steps, settling his hat gingerly upon his hair so as not to disturb the parting, he was not by any means an ill-looking chap. His good height was helped out by his long coat and his high silk hat, and there was plenty of jaw in the lower part of his face. Nor was his tailor altogether answerable for his shoulders. Three years before this time Ross Wilbur had pulled at No. 5 in his 'varsity boat in an Eastern college that was not accustomed to athletic discomfiture.

"I wonder what I'm going to do with myself until

supper-time," he muttered, as he came down the steps, feeling for the middle of his stick. He found no immediate answer to his question. But the afternoon was fine, and he set off to walk in the direction of the town, with a half-formed idea of looking in at his club.

At his club he found a letter in his box from his particular chum, who had been spending the month shooting elk in Oregon.

DEAR OLD MAN [it said]:

Will be back on the afternoon you receive this. Will hit the town on the three o'clock boat. Get seats for the best show going—my treat—and arrange to assimilate nutriment at the Poodle Dog—also mine. I've got miles of talk in me that I've got to reel off before midnight.

Yours,

JERRY.

I've got a stand of horns for you, Ross, that are Glory Hallelujah.

"Well, I can't go," murmured Wilbur, as he remembered the Assembly that was to come off that night and his engaged dance with Jo Herrick. He decided that it would be best to meet Jerry as he came off the boat and tell him how matters stood. Then he resolved, since no one that he knew was in the club, and the instalment of the Paris weeklies had not arrived, that it would be amusing to go down to the water-front and loaf among the shipping until it was time for Jerry's boat.

Wilbur spent an hour along the wharves, watching the great grain ships consigned to "Cork for orders" slowly gorging themselves with whole harvests of wheat from the San Joaquin Valley; lumber vessels for Durban and South African ports settling lower and lower to the water's level as forests of pine and redwood stratified themselves along their decks and in their holds; coal barges discharging from Nanaimo; busy little tugs coughing and nuzzling at the flanks of deep-sea tramps, while hay barges and Italian whitehalls came and went

at every turn. A Stockton River boat went by, her stern wheel churning along behind, like a huge net-reel; a tiny maelstrom of activity centred about an Alaska commercial company's steamboat that would clear for Dawson in the morning.

No quarter of one of the most picturesque cities in the world had more interest for Wilbur than the waterfront. In the mile or so of shipping that stretched from the docks where the China steamships landed, down past the ferry slips and on to Meiggs's wharf, every maritime nation in the world was represented. More than once Wilbur had talked to the loungers of the wharves, stevedores out of work, sailors between voyages, caulkers, and ship chandlers' men looking—not too earnestly—for jobs; so that on this occasion, when a little, undersized fellow in dirty brown sweater and clothes of Barbary Coast cut asked him for a match to light his pipe, Wilbur offered a cigar and passed the time of day with him. Wilbur had not forgotten that he himself was dressed for an afternoon function. But the incongruity of the business was precisely what most amused him.

After a time the fellow suggested drinks. Wilbur hesitated for a moment. It would be something to tell about, however, so, "All right, I'll drink with you," he said.

The brown sweater led the way to a sailors' boarding-house hard by. The rear of the place was built upon piles over the water. But in front, on the ground floor, was a barroom.

"Rum an' gum," announced the brown sweater, as the two came in and took their places at the bar.

"Rum an' gum, Tuck; wattle you have, sir?"

"Oh—I don't know," hesitated Wilbur; "give me a mild Manhattan."

While the drinks were being mixed the brown sweater called Wilbur's attention to a fighting head-dress from

the Marquesas that was hung on the wall over the free-lunch counter and opposite the bar. Wilbur turned about to look at it, and remained so, his back to the barkeeper, till the latter told them their drinks were ready.

"Well, mate, here's big blocks an' taut hawse-pipes," said the brown sweater cordially.

"Your very good health," returned Wilbur.

The brown sweater wiped a thin moustache in the hollow of his palm, and wiped that palm upon his trouser leg.

"Yessir," he continued, once more facing the Marquesas head-dress. "Yessir, they're queer game down there."

"In the Marquesas Islands, you mean?" said Wilbur.

"Yessir, they're queer game. When they ain't tattoin' theirselves with Scripture tex's they git from the missionaries, their pullin' out the hairs all over their bodies with two clam-shells. Hair by hair, y' understan'."

"Pull'n out 'er hair?" said Wilbur, wondering what was the matter with his tongue.

"They think it's clever—think the women folk like it."

Wilbur had fancied that the little man had worn a brown sweater when they first met. But now, strangely enough, he was not in the least surprised to see it iridescent like a pigeon's breast.

"Y' ever been down that way?" inquired the little man next.

Wilbur heard the words distinctly enough, but somehow they refused to fit into the right places in his brain. He pulled himself together, frowning heavily.

"What—did—you—say?" he asked with great deliberation, biting off his words. Then he noticed that he and his companion were no longer in the barroom, but in a little room back of it. His personality divided itself.

There was one Ross Wilbur—who could not make his hands go where he wanted them, who said one word when he thought another, and whose legs below the knee were made of solid lead. Then there was another Ross Wilbur—Ross Wilbur the alert, who was perfectly clear-headed, and who stood off to one side and watched his twin brother making a monkey of himself, without power and without even the desire of helping him.

This latter Wilbur heard the iridescent sweater say:

“Bust me, if y’ a’n’t squiffy, old man. Stand by a bit an’ we’ll have a ball.”

“Can’t have got—return—exceptionally—and the round table—pull out hairs wi’ tu clamsh’ls,” gabbled Wilbur’s stupefied double; and Wilbur the alert said to himself: “You’re not drunk, Ross Wilbur, that’s certain; what could they have put in your cocktail?”

The iridescent sweater stamped twice upon the floor and a trap-door fell away beneath Wilbur’s feet like the drop of a gallows. With the eyes of his undrugged self Wilbur had a glimpse of water below. His elbow struck the floor as he went down, and he fell feet first into a Whitehall boat. He had time to observe two men at the oars and to look between the piles that supported the house above him and catch a glimpse of the bay and a glint of the Contra Costa shore. He was not in the least surprised at what had happened, and made up his mind that it would be a good idea to lie down in the boat and go to sleep.

Suddenly—but how long after his advent into the boat he could not tell—his wits began to return and settle themselves, like wild birds flocking again after a scare. Swiftly he took in the scene. The blue waters of the bay around him, the deck of a schooner on which he stood, the Whitehall boat alongside, and an enormous man with a face like a setting moon wrangling with his friend in the sweater—no longer iridescent.

"What do you call it?" shouted the red man. "I want able seamen—I don't figger on working this boat with dancing masters, do I? We ain't exactly doing quadrilles on my quarterdeck. If we don't look out we'll step on this thing and break it. It ain't ought to be let around loose without its ma."

"Rot that," vociferated the brown sweater. "I tell you he's one of the best sailor men on the front. If he ain't we'll forfeit the money. Come on, Captain Kitchell, we made show enough gettin' away as it was, and this daytime business ain't our line. D'you sign or not? Here's the advance note. I got to duck my nut or I'll have the patrol boat after me."

"I'll sign this once," growled the other, scrawling his name on the note; "but if this swab ain't up to sample, he'll come back by freight, an' I'll drop in on mee dear friend Jim when we come back and give him a reel nice time, an' you can lay to that, Billy Trim." The brown sweater pocketed the note, went over the side, and rowed off.

Wilbur stood in the waist of a schooner anchored in the stream well off Fisherman's wharf. In the forward part of the schooner a Chinaman in brown duck was mixing paint. Wilbur was conscious that he still wore his high hat and long coat, but his stick was gone and one gray glove was slit to the button. In front of him towered the enormous red-faced man. A pungent reek of some kind of rancid fat or oil assailed his nostrils. Over by Alcatraz a ferry-boat whistled for its slip as it elbowed its way through the water.

Wilbur had himself fairly in hand by now. His wits were all about him; but the situation was beyond him as yet.

"Git for'd," commanded the big man.

Wilbur drew himself up, angry in an instant. "Look here," he began, "what's the meaning of this business?"

I know I've been drugged and mishandled. I demand to be put ashore. Do you understand that?"

"Angel child," whimpered the big man. "Oh, you lilee of the vallee, you bright an' mornin' star. I'm reely pained, y'know, that your vally can't come along, but we'll have your piano set up in the lazarette. It gives me genuine grief, it do, to see you bein' obliged to put your lilee white feet on this here vulgar an' dirtee deck. We'll have the Wilton carpet down by to-morrer, so we will, my dear. Yah-h!" he suddenly broke out, as his rage boiled over. "Git for'd, d'ye hear! I'm captain of this here bathtub, an' that's all you need to know for a good while to come. I ain't generally got to tell that to a man but once; but I'll stretch the point just for love of you, angel child. Now, then, move!"

Wilbur stood motionless—puzzled beyond expression. No experience he had ever been through helped in this situation.

"Look here," he began, "I——"

The Captain knocked him down with a blow of one enormous fist upon the mouth, and while he was yet stretched upon the deck kicked him savagely in the stomach. Then he allowed him to rise, caught him by the neck and the slack of his overcoat, and ran him forward to where a hatchway, not two feet across, opened in the deck. Without ado he flung him down into the darkness below; and while Wilbur, dizzied by the fall, sat on the floor at the foot of the vertical companion-ladder, gazing about him with distended eyes, there rained down upon his head, first an oilskin coat, then a sou'wester, a pair of oilskin breeches, woollen socks, and a plug of tobacco. Above him, down the contracted square of the hatch, came the bellowing of the Captain's voice:

"There's your fit-out, Mister Lilee of the Vallee, which the same our dear friend Jim makes a present

of and no charge, because he loves you so. You're allowed two minutes to change, an' it is to be hoped as how you won't force me to come for to assist."

It would have been interesting to have followed, step by step, the mental process that now took place in Ross Wilbur's brain. The Captain had given him two minutes in which to change. The time was short enough, but even at that Wilbur changed more than his clothes during the two minutes he was left to himself in the reeking dark of the schooner's fo'c'sle. It was more than a change—it was a revolution. What he made up his mind to do—precisely what mental attitude he decided to adopt, just what new niche he elected wherein to set his feet, it is difficult to say. Only by results could the change be guessed at. He went down the forward hatch at the toe of Kitchell's boot—silk-hatted, melton-overcoated, patent-booted, and gloved in suèdes. Two minutes later there emerged upon the deck a figure in oilskins and a sou'wester. There was blood upon the face of him and the grime of an unclean ship upon his bare hands. It was Wilbur, and yet not Wilbur. In two minutes he had been, in a way, born again. The only traces of his former self were the patent-leather boots, still persistent in their gloss and shine, that showed with grim incongruity below the vast compass of the oilskin breeches.

As Wilbur came on deck he saw the crew of the schooner hurrying forward, six of them, Chinamen every one, in brown jeans and black felt hats. On the quarter-deck stood the Captain, barking his orders.

"Consider the Lilee of the Vallee," bellowed the latter, as his eye fell upon Wilbur the Transformed. "Clap on to that starboard windlass brake, sonny."

Wilbur saw the Chinamen ranging themselves about what he guessed was the windlass in the schooner's bow. He followed and took his place among them, grasping one of the bars.

"Brake down!" came the next order. Wilbur and the Chinamen obeyed, bearing up and down upon the bars till the slack of the anchor-chain came home and stretched taut and dripping from the hawse-holes.

"'Vast heavin'!"

And then as Wilbur released the brake and turned about for the next order, he cast his glance out upon the bay, and there, not a hundred and fifty yards away, her spotless sails tense, her cordage humming, her immaculate flanks slipping easily through the waves, the water hissing and churning under her forefoot, clean, gleaming, dainty, and aristocratic, the Ridgeways' yacht *Petrel* passed like a thing of life. Wilbur saw Nat Ridgeway himself at the wheel. Girls in smart gowns and young fellows in white ducks and yachting caps—all friends of his—crowded the decks. A little orchestra of musicians were reeling off a quickstep.

The popping of a cork and a gale of talk and laughter came to his ears. Wilbur stared at the picture, his face devoid of expression. The *Petrel* came on—drew nearer—was not a hundred feet away from the schooner's stern. A strong swimmer, such as Wilbur, could cover the distance in a few strokes. Two minutes ago Wilbur might have——

"Set your mains'l," came the bellow of Captain Kitchell. "Clap on to your throat and peak halyards."

The Chinamen hurried aft.

Wilbur followed.

CHAPTER II

A NAUTICAL EDUCATION

IN THE course of the next few moments, while the little vessel was being got under way, and while the Ridgeways' *Petrel* gleamed off into the blue distance, Wilbur made certain observations.

The name of the boat on which he found himself was the *Bertha Millner*. She was a two-topmast, 28-ton keel schooner, 40 feet long, carrying a large spread of sail—mainsail, foresail, jib, flying-jib, two gaff-topsails, and a staysail. She was very dirty and smelt abominably of some kind of a rancid oil. Her crew were Chinamen; there was no mate. But the cook—himself a Chinaman—who appeared from time to time at the door of the galley, a potato-masher in his hand, seemed to have some sort of authority over the hands. He acted in a manner as a go-between for the Captain and the crew, sometimes interpreting the former's orders, and occasionally giving one of his own.

Wilbur heard the Captain address him as Charlie. He spoke pigeon English fairly. Of the balance of the crew—the five Chinamen—Wilbur could make nothing. They never spoke, neither to Captain Kitchell, to Charlie, nor to each other; and for all the notice they took of Wilbur he might easily have been a sack of sand. Wilbur felt that his advent on the *Bertha Millner* was by its very nature an extraordinary event; but the absolute indifference of these brown-suited Mongols, the blankness of their flat, fat faces, the dullness of their slanting, fishlike eyes that never met his own or even wandered in

his direction, was uncanny, disquieting. In what strange venture was he now to be involved, toward what unknown vortex was this new current setting, this current that had so suddenly snatched him from the solid ground of his accustomed life?

He told himself grimly that he was to have a free cruise up the bay, perhaps as far as Alviso; perhaps the *Bertha Millner* would even make the circuit of the bay before returning to San Francisco. He might be gone a week. Wilbur could already see the scare-heads of the daily papers the next morning, chronicling the disappearance of "One of Society's Most Popular Members."

"That's well, y'r throat halyards. Here, Lilee of the Vallee, give a couple of pulls on y'r peak halyard purchase."

Wilbur stared at the Captain helplessly.

"No can tell, hey?" inquired Charlie from the galley. "Pull um disa lope, sabe?"

Wilbur tugged at the rope the cook indicated.

"That's well, y'r peak halyard purchase," chanted Captain Kitchell.

Wilbur made the rope fast. The mainsail was set, and hung slatting and flapping in the wind. Next the for'sail was set in much the same manner, and Wilbur was ordered to "lay out on the ji'boom and cast the gaskets off the jib." He "lay out" as best he could and cast off the gaskets—he knew barely enough of yachting to understand an order here and there—and by the time he was back on the fo'c'sle head the Chinamen were at the jib halyard and hoisting away.

"That's well, y'r jib halyards."

The *Bertha Millner* veered round and played off to the wind, tugging at her anchor.

"Man y'r windlass."

Wilbur and the crew jumped once more to the brakes.

"Brake down, heave y'r anchor to the cathead."

The anchor-chain, already taut, vibrated and then cranked through the hawse-holes as the hands rose and fell at the brakes. The anchor came home, dripping gray slime. A nor'west wind filled the schooner's sails, a strong ebb tide caught her underfoot.

"We're off," muttered Wilbur, as the *Bertha Millner* heeled to the first gust.

But evidently the schooner was not bound up the bay.

"Must be Vallejo or Benicia, then," hazarded Wilbur, as the sails grew tenser and the water rippled ever louder under the schooner's forefoot. "Maybe they're going after hay or wheat."

The schooner was tacking, headed directly for Meiggs's wharf. She came in closer and closer, so close that Wilbur could hear the talk of the fishermen sitting on the stringpieces. He had just made up his mind that they were to make a landing there, when—

"Stand by for stays," came the raucous bark of the Captain, who had taken the wheel. The sails slatted furiously as the schooner came about. Then the *Bertha Millner* caught the wind again and lay over quietly and contentedly to her work. The next tack brought the schooner close under Alcatraz. The sea became heavier, the breeze grew stiff and smelt of the outside ocean. Out beyond them to westward opened the Golden Gate, a bleak vista of gray-green water roughened with white-caps.

"Stand by for stays."

Once again, as the rudder went hard over, the *Bertha Millner* fretted and danced and shook her sails, calling impatiently for the wind, chafing at its absence like a child reft of a toy. Then again she scooped the nor'-wester in the hollow palms of her tense canvases and settled quietly down on the new tack, her bowsprit pointing straight toward the Presidio.

"We'll come about again soon," Wilbur told himself, "and stand over toward the Contra Costa shore."

A fine huge breath of wind passed over the schooner. She heeled it on the instant, the water roaring along her quarter, but she kept her course. Wilbur fell thoughtful again, never more keenly observant.

"She must come about soon," he muttered uneasily, "if she's going to stand up toward Vallejo." His heart sank with a sudden apprehension. A nervousness he could not overcome seized upon him. The *Bertha Millner* held tenaciously to the tack. Within fifty yards of the Presidio came the command again:

"Stand by for stays."

Once more, her bows dancing, her cordage rattling, her sails flapping noisily, the schooner came about. Anxiously Wilbur observed the bowsprit as it circled like a hand on a dial, watching where now it would point. It wavered, fluctuated, rose, fell, then settled easily, pointing toward Lime Point. Wilbur felt a sudden coldness at his heart.

"This isn't going to be so much fun," he muttered between his teeth. The schooner was not bound up the bay for Alviso nor to Vallejo for grain. The track toward Lime Point could mean but one thing. The wind was freshening from the nor'west, the ebb tide rushing out to meet the ocean like a mill-race, at every moment the Golden Gate opened out wider, and within two minutes after the time of the last tack the *Bertha Millner* heeled to a great gust that had come booming in between the heads, straight from the open Pacific.

"Stand by for stays."

As before, one of the Chinese hands stood by the sail rope of the jib.

"Draw y'r jib."

The jib filled. The schooner came about on the port tack; Lime Point fell away over the stern rail. The huge

ground swells began to come in, and as she rose and bowed to the first of these it was precisely as though the *Bertha Millner* was making her courtesy to the great gray ocean, now for the first time in full sight on her star-board quarter.

The schooner was beating out to sea through the Middle Channel. Once clear of the Golden Gate, she stood over toward the Cliff House, then on the next tack cleared Point Bonita. The sea began building up in deadly earnest—they were about to cross the bar. Everything was battened down, the scuppers were awash, and the hawse-holes spouted like fountains after every plunge. Once the Captain ordered all men aloft, just in time to escape a gigantic dull green roller that broke like a Niagara over the schooner's bows, smothering the decks knee-deep in a twinkling.

The wind blew violent and cold, the spray was flying like icy small-shot. Without intermission the *Bertha Millner* rolled and plunged and heaved and sank. Wilbur was drenched to the skin and sore in every joint, from being shunted from rail to mast and from mast to rail again. The cordage sang like harp-strings, the schooner's forefoot crushed down into the heaving water with a hissing like that of steam, blocks rattled, the Captain bellowed his orders, rope-ends flogged the hollow deck till it reverberated like a drum-head. The crossing of the bar was one long half-hour of confusion and discordant sound.

When they were across the bar the Captain ordered the cook to give the men their food.

"Git for'rd, sonny," he added, fixing Wilbur with his eye. "Git for'rd, this is tawble dee hote, savvy?"

Wilbur crawled forward on the reeling deck, holding on now to a mast, now to a belaying-pin, now to a stay, watching his chance and going on between the inebriated plunges of the schooner.

He descended the fo'c'sle hatch. The Chinamen were already there, sitting on the edges of their bunks. On the floor, at the bottom of the ladder, punk-sticks were burning in an old tomato-can.

Charlie brought in supper—stewed beef and pork in a bread-pan and a wooden kit—and the Chinamen ate it in silence with their sheath-knives and from tin plates. A liquid that bore a distant resemblance to coffee was served. Wilbur learned afterward to know the stuff as Black Jack, and to be aware that it was made from bud barley and was sweetened with molasses. A single reeking lamp swung with the swinging of the schooner over the centre of the group, and long afterward Wilbur could remember the grisly scene—the punk-sticks, the bread-pan full of hunks of meat, the horrid close and oily smell, and the circle of silent, preoccupied Chinese, each sitting on his bunk-ledge, devouring stewed pork and holding his pannikin of Black Jack between his feet against the rolling of the boat.

Wilbur looked fearfully at the mess in the pan, recalling the chocolate and stuffed olives that had been his last luncheon.

"Well," he muttered, clenching his teeth, "I've got to come to it sooner or later." His penknife was in the pocket of his waistcoat, underneath his oilskin coat. He opened the big blade, harpooned a cube of pork, and deposited it on his tin plate. He ate it slowly and with savage determination. But the Black Jack was more than he could bear.

"I'm not hungry enough for that just now," he told himself. "Say, Jim," he said, turning to the Chinaman next him on the bunk-ledge, "say, what kind of boat is this? What you do—where you go?"

The other moved away impatiently.

"No sabe, no sabe," he answered, shaking his head

and frowning. Throughout the whole of that strange meal these were the only words spoken.

When Wilbur came on deck again he noted that the *Bertha Millner* had already left the whistling-buoy astern. Off to the east, her sails just showing above the waves, was a pilot-boat with the number 7 on her main-sail. The evening was closing in; the Farallones were in plain sight dead ahead. Far behind, in a mass of shadow just bluer than the sky, he could make out a few twinkling lights—San Francisco.

Half an hour later Kitchell came on deck from his supper in cabin aft. He glanced in the direction of the mainland, now almost out of sight, then took the wheel from one of the Chinamen and commanded, "Ease off y'r fore an' main sheets." The hands eased away and the schooner played off before the wind.

The staysail was set. The *Bertha Millner* headed to southwest, bowing easily ahead of a good eight-knot breeze.

Next came the order "All hands aft!" and Wilbur and his mates betook themselves to the quarterdeck. Charlie took the wheel, and he and Kitchell began to choose the men for their watches, just as Wilbur remembered to have chosen sides for baseball during his school days.

"Sonny, I'll choose you; you're on my watch," said the Captain to Wilbur, "and I will assum the responsibility of your nautical eddocation."

"I may as well tell you at once," began Wilbur, "that I'm no sailor."

"But you will be, soon," answered the Captain, at once soothing and threatening; "you will be, Mister Lilee of the Vallee, you kin lay to it, as how you will be one of the best sailor men along the front, as our friend Jim says. Before I git thoo with you, you'll be a sailorman or shark-bait, I can promise you. You're on my watch; step over here, son."

The watches were divided, Charlie and three other Chinamen on the port, Kitchell, Wilbur, and two Chinamen on the starboard. The men trooped forward again.

The tiny world of the schooner had lapsed to quiet. The *Bertha Millner* was now clear of the land, that lay like a blur of faintest purple smoke—ever growing fainter—low in the east. The Farallones showed but their shoulders above the horizon. The schooner was standing well out from shore—even beyond the track of the coasters and passenger steamers—to catch the trades from the northwest. The sun was setting royally, and the floor of the ocean shimmered like mosaic. The sea had gone down and the fury of the bar was a thing forgotten. It was perceptibly warmer.

On board, the two watches mingled forward, smoking opium and playing a game that looked like checkers. Three of them were washing down the decks with kaiair brooms. For the first time since he had come on board Wilbur heard the sound of their voices.

The evening was magnificent. Never to Wilbur's eyes had the Pacific appeared so vast, so radiant, so divinely beautiful. A star or two burnt slowly through that part of the sky where the pink began to fade into the blue. Charlie went forward and set the side lights—red on the port rigging, green on the starboard. As he passed Wilbur, who was leaning over the rail and watching the phosphorus flashing just under the surface, he said: "Hey, you go talkee-talk one-piecey Boss, savvy Boss—chin-chin."

Wilbur went aft and came up on the poop, where Kitchell stood at the wheel, smoking an inverted "Tarrier's Delight."

"Now, son," began Kitchell, "I natch'ly love you so that I'm goin' to do you a real favour, do you twig? I'm goin' to allow you to berth aft in the cabin, 'long o' me an' Charlie, an' besides you can make free of my quarter-

deck. Mebbe you ain't used to the ways of sailor men just yet, but you can lay it to that those two are reel concessions, savvy? I ain't a mush-head, like mee dear friend Jim. You ain't no water-front swine, I can guess that with one hand tied beehind me. You're a toff, that's what you are, and your lines has been laid for toffs. I ain't askin' you no questions, but you got brains, an' I figger on gettin' more outa you by lettin' you have y'r head a bit. But mind, now, you get gay once, sonny, or try to flimflam me, or forget that I'm the boss of the bathtub, an' strike me blind, I'll cut you open, an' you can lay to that, son. Now, then, here's the game: You work this boat 'long with the coolies, an' take my orders, an' walk chalk, an' I'll teach you navigation, an' make this cruise as easy as how-do-you-do. You don't, an' I'll manhandle you till y'r bones come throo y'r hide."

"I've no choice in the matter," said Wilbur. "I've got to make the best of a bad situation."

"I ree-marked as how you had brains," muttered the Captain.

"But there's one thing," continued Wilbur, "if I'm to have my head a little, as you say, you'll find we can get along better if you put me to rights about this whole business. Why was I brought aboard, why are there only Chinese along, where are we going, what are we going to do, and how long are we going to be gone?"

Kitchell spat over the side, and then sucked the nicotine from his moustache.

"Well," he said, resuming his pipe, "it's like this, son. This ship belongs to one of the Six Chinese Companies of Chinatown in Frisco. Charlie, here, is one of the shareholders in the business. We go down here twice a year off Cape Sain' Lucas, Lower California, an' fish for blue sharks, or white, if we kin ketch 'em. We get the livers of these an' try out the oil, an' we bring back that same oil, an' the Chinamen sell it all over San

Francisco as simon-pure cod-liver oil, savvy? An' it pays like a nitrate bed. I come in because it's a Custom-House regulation that no coolie can take a boat out of Frisco."

"And how do I come in?" asked Wilbur.

"Mee dear friend Jim put a knock-me-out drop into your Manhattan cocktail. It's a capsule filled with a drug. You were shanghaied, son," said the Captain, blandly.

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About an hour later Wilbur turned in. Kitchell showed him his bunk with its "donkey's breakfast" and single ill-smelling blanket. It was located under the companionway that led down into the cabin. Kitchell bunked on one side, Charlie on the other. A hacked deal table, covered with oilcloth and ironed to the floor, a swinging-lamp, two chairs, a rack of books, a chest or two, and a flaring picture cut from the advertisement of a ballet, was the room's inventory in the matter of furniture and ornament.

Wilbur sat on the edge of his bunk before undressing, reviewing the extraordinary events of the day. In a moment he was aware of a movement in one of the other two bunks, and presently made out Charlie lying on his side and holding in the flame of an alcohol lamp a skewer on which some brown and sticky stuff boiled and sizzled. He transferred the stuff to the bowl of a huge pipe and drew on it noisily once or twice. In another moment he had sunk back in his bunk, nearly senseless, but with a long breath of an almost blissful contentment.

"Beast!" muttered Wilbur, with profound disgust.

He threw off his oilskin coat and felt in the pocket of his waistcoat (which he had retained when he had changed his clothes in the fo'c'sle) for his watch. He

drew it out. It was just nine o'clock. All at once an idea occurred to him. He fumbled in another pocket of the waistcoat and brought out one of his calling-cards.

For a moment Wilbur remained motionless, seated on the bunk-ledge, smiling grimly, while his glance wandered now to the sordid cabin of the *Bertha Millner* and the opium-drugged coolie sprawled on the "donkey's breakfast," and now to the card in his hand on which a few hours ago he had written:

"First waltz—Jo."

CHAPTER III

THE LADY LETTY

ANOTHER day passed, then two. Before Wilbur knew it he had settled himself to his new life, and woke one morning to the realization that he was positively enjoying himself. Daily the weather grew warmer. The fifth day out from San Francisco it was actually hot. The pitch grew soft in the *Bertha Millner's* deck seams, the masts sweated resin. The Chinamen went about the decks wearing but their jeans and blouses. Kitchell had long since abandoned his coat and vest. Wilbur's oil-skins became intolerable, and he was at last constrained to trade his pocket-knife to Charlie for a suit of jeans and wicker sandals, such as the coolies wore—and odd enough he looked in them.

The Captain instructed him in steering, and even promised to show him the use of the sextant and how to take an observation in the fake short and easy coasting style of navigation. Furthermore, he showed him how to read the log and the manner of keeping the dead reckoning.

During most of his watches Wilbur was engaged in painting the inside of the cabin, door panels, lintels, and the few scattered mouldings; and toward the middle of the first week out, when the *Bertha Millner* was in the latitude of Point Conception, he and three Chinamen, under Kitchell's direction, ratlined down the forerigging and affixed the crow's nest upon the foremast. The next morning, during Charlie's watch on deck,

a Chinaman was sent up into the crow's nest, and from that time on there was always a lookout maintained from the masthead.

More than once Wilbur looked around him at the empty coruscating indigo of the ocean floor, wondering at the necessity of the lookout, and finally expressed his curiosity to Kitchell. The Captain had by now taken not a little to Wilbur; at first for the sake of a white man's company, and afterward because he began to place a certain vague reliance upon Wilbur's judgment. Kitchell had ree-marked as how he had brains.

"Well, you see, son," Kitchell had explained to Wilbur, "os-tensiblee we are after shark-liver oil—and so we are; but also we are on any lay that turns up; ready for any game, from wrecking to barratry. Strike me, if I haven't thought of scuttling the dough-dish for her insoorance. There's regular trade, son, to be done in ships, and then there's pickin's an' pickin's, an' pickin's. Lord, the ocean's rich with pickin's. Do you know there's millions made out of the day-bree and refuse of a big city? How about an ocean's day-bree, just chew on that notion a turn; an' as fur a lookout, lemmee tell you, son, cast your eye out yon," and he swept the sea with a forearm; "nothin', hey, so it looks, but lemmee tell you, son, there ain't no manner of place on the ball of dirt where you're likely to run up afoul of so many things—unexpected things—as at sea. When you're clear o' land lay to this here pree-cep', 'A million to one on the unexpected.'"

The next day fell almost dead calm. The hale, lusty-lunged nor'wester that had snorted them forth from the Golden Gate had lapsed to a zephyr, the schooner rolled lazily southward with the leisurely nonchalance of a grazing ox. At noon, just after dinner, a few cat's-paws curdled the milky-blue whiteness of the glassy surface, and the water once more began to talk beneath

the bowsprit. It was very hot. The sun spun silently like a spinning brass discus over the mainmast. On the fo'c'sle head the Chinamen were asleep or smoking opium. It was Charlie's watch. Kitchell dozed in his hammock in the shadow of the mainsheet. Wilbur was below tinkering with his paint-pot about the cabin. The stillness was profound. It was the stillness of the summer sea at high noon.

The lookout in the crow's nest broke the quiet.

"Hy-yah, hy-yah!" he cried, leaning from the barrel and calling through an arched palm. "Hy-yah, one, two, plenty, many turtle, topside wattah; hy-yah, all-same turtle."

"Hello, hello!" cried the Captain, rolling from his hammock. "Turtle? Where-away?"

"I tink um 'bout quallah mile, mebbbee, four-piecee turtle all-same weatha bow."

"Turtle, hey? Down y'r wheel, Jim, haul y'r jib to win'ward," he commanded the man at the wheel; then to the men forward: "Get the dory overboard. Son, Charlie, and you, Wing, tumble in. Wake up now and see you stay so."

The dory was swung over the side, and the men dropped into her and took their places at the oars. "Give way," cried the Captain, settling himself in the bow with the gaff in his hand. "Hey, Jim!" he shouted to the lookout far above, "hey, lay our course for us." The lookout nodded, the oars fell, and the dory shot forward in the direction indicated by the lookout.

"Kin you row, son?" asked Kitchell, with sudden suspicion. Wilbur smiled.

"You ask Charlie and Wing to ship their oars and give me a pair." The Captain complied, hesitating.

"Now, what," he said grimly, "now, what do you think you're going to do, sonny?"

"I'm going to show you the Bob Cook stroke we used

in our boat in '95, when we beat Harvard," answered Wilbur.

Kitchell gazed doubtfully at the first few strokes, then with growing interest watched the tremendous reach, the powerful knee-drive, the swing, the easy catch, and the perfect recover. The dory was cutting the water like a gasoline launch, and between strokes there was the least possible diminishing of the speed.

"I'm a bit out of form just now," remarked Wilbur, "and I'm used to the sliding seat; but I guess it'll do." Kitchell glanced at the human machine that once was No. 5 in the Yale boat and then at the water hissing from the dory's bows. "My Gawd!" he said, under his breath. He spat over the bows and sucked the nicotine from his moustache, thoughtfully.

"I ree-marked," he observed, "as how you had brains, my son."

A few minutes later the Captain, who was standing in the dory's bow and alternately conning the ocean's surface and looking back to the Chinaman standing on the schooner's masthead, uttered an exclamation:

"Steady, ship your oars, quiet now, quiet, you damn fools! We're right on 'em—four, by Gawd, an' big as dinin'-tables!"

The oars were shipped. The dory's speed dwindled. "Out your paddles, sit on the gun'l, and paddle ee-asy." The hands obeyed. The Captain's voice dropped to a whisper. His back was toward them and he gestured with one free hand. Looking out over the water from his seat on the gun'l, Wilbur could make out a round, greenish mass like a patch of floating seaweed, just under the surface, some sixty yards ahead.

"Easy sta'board," whispered the Captain under his elbow. "Go ahead, port; e-e-easy all, steady, steady."

The affair began to assume the intensity of a little drama—a little drama of midocean. In spite of himself,

Wilbur was excited. He even found occasion to observe that the life was not so bad, after all. This was as good fun as stalking deer. The dory moved forward by inches. Kitchell's whisper was as faint as a dying infant's: "Steady all, s-steadee, sh-stead——"

He lunged forward sharply with the gaff, and shouted aloud: "I got him—grab holt his tail flippers, you fool swabs; grab holt quick—don't you leggo—got him there, Charlie? If he gets away, you swine, I'll rip y' open with the gaff—heave now—heave—there—there—soh, stand clear his nippers. Strike me! he's a whacker. I thought he was going to get away. Saw me just as I swung the gaff, an' ducked his nut."

Over the side, bundled without ceremony into the boat, clawing, thrashing, clattering, and blowing like the exhaust of a donkey-engine, tumbled the great green turtle, his wet green shield of shell three feet from edge to edge, the gaff firmly transfixed in his body, just under the fore-flipper. From under his shell protruded his snake-like head and neck, withered like that of an old man. He was waving his head from side to side, the jaws snapping like a snapped silk handkerchief. Kitchell thrust him away with a paddle. The turtle craned his neck, and, catching the bit of wood in his jaw, bit it in a single grip.

"I tol' you so, I tol' you to stand clear his snapper. If that had been your shin now, eh? Hello, what's that?"

Faintly across the water came a prolonged hallooing from the schooner. Kitchell stood up in the dory, shading his eyes with his hat.

"What's bitin' 'em now?" he muttered, with the uneasiness of a captain away from his ship. "Oughta left Charlie on board—or you, son. Who's doin' that yellin'? I can't make out."

"Up in the crow's nest," exclaimed Wilbur. "It's Jim, see, he's waving his arms."

"Well, whaduz he wave his dam' fool arms for?"

growled Kitchell, angry because something was going forward he did not understand.

"There, he's shouting again. Listen—I can't make out what he's yelling."

"He'll yell to a different pipe when I get my grip of him. I'll twist the head of that swab till he'll have to walk back'ard to see where he's goin'. Whaduz he wave his arms for—whaduz he yell like a dam' philly-loo bird for? What's him say, Charlie?"

"Jim heap sing, no can tell. Mebbe—tink um sing, come back chop-chop."

"We'll see. Oars out, men, give way. Now, son, put a little o' that Yale stingo in the stroke."

In the crow's nest Jim still yelled and waved like one distraught, while the dory returned at a smart clip toward the schooner. Kitchell lathered with fury.

"Oh-h," he murmured softly through his gritted teeth. "Jess lemmee lay mee two hands afoul of you wunst, you gibbering, yellow philly-loo bird, believe me, you'll dance. Shut up!" he roared; "shut up, you crazy do-do, ain't we coming fast as we can?"

The dory bumped alongside, and the Captain was over the rail like quicksilver. The hands were all in the bow, looking and pointing to the west. Jim slid down the ratlines, bubbling over with suppressed news. Before his feet had touched the deck Kitchell had kicked him into the stays again, fulminating blasphemies.

"Sing!" he shouted, as the Chinaman clambered away like a bewildered ape; "sing a little more. I would if I were you. Why don't you sing and wave, you dam' fool philly-loo bird?"

"Yas, sah," answered the coolie.

"What you yell for? Charlie, ask him whaffo him sing."

"I tink um ship," answered Charlie calmly, looking out over the starboard quarter.

"Ship!"

"Him velly sick," hazarded the Chinaman from the ratlines, adding a sentence in Chinese to Charlie.

"He says he tink um ship sick, all same; ask um something—ship velly sick."

By this time the Captain, Wilbur, and all on board could plainly make out a sail some eight miles off the starboard bow. Even at that distance, and to eyes so inexperienced as those of Wilbur, it needed but a glance to know that something was wrong with her. It was not that she failed to ride the waves with even keel, it was not that her rigging was in disarray, nor that her sails were disordered. Her distance was too great to make out such details. But in precisely the same manner as a trained physician glances at a doomed patient, and from that indefinable look in the face of him and the eyes of him pronounces the verdict "death," so Kitchell took in the stranger with a single comprehensive glance, and exclaimed:

"Wreck!"

"Yas, sah. I tink um velly sick."

"Oh, go to 'll, or go below and fetch up my glass—hustle!"

The glass was brought. "Son," exclaimed Kitchell—"where is that man with the brains? Son, come aloft here with me." The two clambered up the ratlines to the crow's nest. Kitchell adjusted the glass.

"She's a bark," he muttered, "iron built—about seven hundred tons, I guess—in distress. There's her ensign upside down at the mizz'nhead—looks like Norway—an' her distress signals on the spanker gaff. Take a blink at her, son—what do you make her out? Lord, she's ridin' high."

Wilbur took the glass, catching the stranger after several clumsy attempts. She was, as Captain Kitchell had announced, a bark, and, to judge by her flag, evidently Norwegian.

"How she rolls!" muttered Wilbur.

"That's what I can't make out," answered Kitchell. "A bark such as she ain't ought to roll thata way; her ballast'd steady her."

"What's the flags on that boom aft—one's red and white and square-shaped, and the other's the same color, only swallow-tail in shape?"

"That's H. B., meanin': 'I am in need of assistance.'"

"Well, where's the crew? I don't see anybody on board."

"Oh, they're there right enough."

"Then they're pretty well concealed about the premises," returned Wilbur, as he passed the glass to the Captain.

"She does seem kinda empty," said the Captain in a moment, with a sudden show of interest that Wilbur failed to understand.

"An' where's her boats?" continued Kitchell. "I don't just quite make out any boats at all." There was a long silence.

"Seems to be a sort of haze over her," observed Wilbur.

"I noticed that, air kinda quivers oily-like. No boats, no boats—an' I can't see anybody aboard." Suddenly Kitchell lowered the glass and turned to Wilbur. He was a different man. There was a new shine in his eyes, a wicked line appeared over the nose, the jaw grew salient, prognathous.

"Son," he exclaimed, gimleting Wilbur with his contracted eyes; "I have ree-marked as how you had brains. I kin fool the coolies, but I can't fool you. It looks to me as if that bark yonder was a derelict; an' do you know what that means to us? Chaw on it a turn."

"A derelict?"

"If there's a crew on board they're concealed from the public gaze—an' where are the boats then? I figger

she's an abandoned derelict. Do you know what that means for us—for you and I? It means," and gripping Wilbur by the shoulders, he spoke the word into his face with a savage intensity. "It means salvage, do you savvy?—salvage, salvage. Do you figger what salvage on a seven-hundred-tonner would come to? Well, just lemme drop it into your think tank, an' lay to what I say. It's all the ways from fifty to seventy thousand dollars, whatever her cargo is; call it sixty thousand—thirty thou' apiece. Oh, I don't know!" he exclaimed, lapsing to landman's slang. "Wha'd I say about a million to one on the unexpected at sea?"

"Thirty thousand!" exclaimed Wilbur, without thought as yet.

"Now y'r singin' songs," cried the Captain. "Listen to me, son," he went on, rapidly shutting up the glass and thrusting it back in the case; "my name's Kitchell, and I'm hog right through." He emphasized the words with a levelled forefinger, his eyes flashing. "H—O—G spells very truly yours, Alvinza Kitchell—ninety-nine swine an' me make a hundred swine. I'm a shoat with both feet in the trough, first, last, an' always. If that bark's abandoned, an' I says she is, she's ours. I'm out for anything that there's stuff in. I guess I'm more of a beach comber by nature than anything else. If she's abandoned she belongs to us. To 'll with this coolie game. We'll go beach combin', you an' I. We'll board that bark and work her into the nearest port—San Diego, I guess—and get the salvage on her if we have to swim in her. Are you with me?" he held out his hand. The man was positively trembling from head to heel. It was impossible to resist the excitement of the situation, its novelty—the high crow's nest of the schooner, the keen salt air, the Chinamen grouped far below, the indigo of the warm ocean, and out yonder the forsaken

derelict, rolling her light hull till the garboard streak flashed in the sun.

"Well, of course, I'm with you, Cap," exclaimed Wilbur, gripping Kitchell's hand. "When there's thirty thousand to be had for the asking I guess I'm a 'na'chel bawn' beach comber myself."

"Now, nothing about this to the coolies."

"But how will you make out with your owners, the Six Companies? Aren't you bound to bring the *Bertha* in?"

"Rot my owners!" exclaimed Kitchell. "I ain't a skipper of no oil-boat any longer. I'm a beach comber." He fixed the wallowing bark with glistening eyes. "Gawd strike me," he murmured, "ain't she a daisy? It's a little Klondike. Come on, son."

The two went down the ratlines, and Kitchell ordered a couple of the hands into the dory that had been rowing astern. He and Wilbur followed. Charlie was left on board, with direction to lay the schooner to. The dory flew over the water, Wilbur setting the stroke. In a few moments she was well up with the bark. Though a larger boat than the *Bertha Millner*, she was rolling in lamentable fashion, and every labouring heave showed her bottom encrusted with barnacles and seaweed.

Her fore and main tops'ls and to-gallants'ls were set, as also were her lower stays'ls and royals. But the braces seemed to have parted, and the yards were swinging back and forth in their ties. The spanker was brailed up, and the spanker boom thrashed idly over the poop as the bark rolled and rolled and rolled. The mainmast was working in its shoe, the rigging and backstays sagged. An air of abandonment, of unspeakable loneliness, of abomination hung about her. Never had Wilbur seen anything more utterly alone. Within three lengths the Captain rose in his place and shouted:

"Bark ahoy!" There was no answer. Thrice he re-

peated the call, and thrice the dismal thrashing of the spanker boom and the flapping of the sails was the only answer. Kitchell turned to Wilbur in triumph. "I guess she's ours," he whispered. They were now close enough to make out the bark's name upon her counter, *Lady Letty*, and Wilbur was in the act of reading it aloud, when a huge brown dorsal fin, like the triangular sail of a lugger, cut the water between the dory and the bark.

"Shark!" said Kitchell; "and there's another!" he exclaimed in the next instant, "and another! Strike me, the water's alive with 'em! There's a stiff on the bark, you can lay to that"; and at that, acting on some strange impulse, he called again, "Bark ahoy!" There was no response.

The dory was now well up to the derelict, and pretty soon a prolonged and vibratory hissing noise, strident, insistent, smote upon their ears.

"What's that?" exclaimed Wilbur, perplexed. The Captain shook his head, and just then, as the bark rolled almost to her scuppers in their direction, a glimpse of the deck was presented to their view. It was only a glimpse, gone on the instant, as the bark rolled back to port, but it was time enough for Wilbur and the Captain to note the parted and open seams and the deck bulging, and in one corner blown up and splintered.

The Captain smote a thigh.

"Coal!" he cried. "Anthracite coal. The coal he't up and generated gas, of course—no fire, y'understand, just gas—gas blew up the deck—no way of stopping combustion. Naturally they had to cut for it. Smell the gas, can't you? No wonder she's hissing—no wonder she rolled—cargo goes off in gas—and what's to weigh her down? I was wondering what could 'a' wrecked her in this weather. Lord, it's as plain as Billy-b'damn."

The dory was alongside. Kitchell watched his chance, and as the bark rolled down caught the mainyard-brace

hanging in a bight over the rail and swung himself to the deck. "Look sharp!" he called, as Wilbur followed. "It won't do for you to fall among them shark, son. Just look at the hundreds of 'em. There's a stiff on board, sure."

Wilbur steadied himself on the swaying broken deck, choking against the reek of coal-gas that hissed upward on every hand. The heat was almost like a furnace. Everything metal was intolerable to the touch.

"She's abandoned, sure," muttered the Captain. "Look," and he pointed to the empty chocks on the house and the severed lashings. "Oh, it's a haul, son; it's a haul, an' you can lay to that. Now, then, cabin first," and he started aft.

But it was impossible to go into the cabin. The moment the door was opened suffocating billows of gas rushed out and beat them back. On the third trial the Captain staggered out, almost overcome with its volume.

"Can't get in there for a while yet," he gasped, "but I saw the stiff on the floor by the table; looks like the old man. He's spit his false teeth out. I knew there was a stiff aboard."

"Then there's more than one," said Wilbur. "See there!" From behind the wheel-box in the stern protruded a hand and forearm in an oilskin sleeve.

Wilbur ran up, peered over the little space between the wheel and the wheelbox, and looked straight into a pair of eyes—eyes that were alive. Kitchell came up.

"One left, anyhow," he muttered, looking over Wilbur's shoulder; "sailor man, though; can't interfere with our salvage. The bark's derelict, right enough. Shake him out of there, son; can't you see, the lad's dotty with the gas?"

Cramped into the narrow space of the wheel-box like a terrified hare in a blind burrow was the figure of a young boy. So firmly was he wedged into the corner

that Kitchell had to kick down the box before he could be reached. The boy spoke no word. Stupefied with the gas, he watched them with vacant eyes.

Wilbur put a hand under the lad's arm and got him to his feet. He was a tall, well-made fellow, with ruddy complexion and milk-blue eyes, and was dressed, as if for heavy weather, in oilskins.

"Well, sonny, you've had a fine mess aboard here," said Kitchell. The boy—he might have been two and twenty—stared and frowned.

"Clean loco from the gas. Get him into the dory, son. I'll try this bloody cabin again."

Kitchell turned back and descended from the poop, and Wilbur, his arm around the boy, followed. Kitchell was already out of hearing, and Wilbur was bracing himself upon the rolling deck, steadying the young fellow at his side, when the latter heaved a deep breath. His throat and breast swelled. Wilbur stared sharply, with a muttered exclamation:

"My God, it's a girl!" he said.

CHAPTER IV

MORAN

MEANWHILE Charlie had brought the *Bertha Millner* up to within hailing distance of the bark, and had hove her to. Kitchell ordered Wilbur to return to the schooner and bring over a couple of axes.

"We'll have to knock holes all through the house, and break in the skylights, and let the gas escape before we can do anything. Take the kid over and give him whiskey; then come along back and bear a hand."

Wilbur had considerable difficulty in getting into the dory from the deck of the plunging derelict with his dazed and almost helpless charge. Even as he slid down the rope into the little boat and helped the girl to follow, he was aware of two dull, brownish-green shadows moving just beneath the water's surface not ten feet away, and knew that he was being stealthily watched. The Chinamen at the oars of the dory, with that extraordinary absence of curiosity which is the mark of the race, did not glance a second time at the survivor of the *Lady Letty's* misadventure. To them it was evident she was but a for'mast hand. However, Wilbur examined her with extraordinary interest as she sat in the stern sheets, sullen, half-defiant, half-bewildered, and bereft of speech.

She was not pretty—she was too tall for that—quite as tall as Wilbur himself, and her skeleton was too massive. Her face was red, and the glint of blue ice was in her eyes. Her eyelashes and eyebrows, as well as the almost imperceptible down that edged her cheek when she turned against the light, were blonde almost to

whiteness. What beauty she had was of the fine, hardy Norse type. Her hands were red and hard, and even beneath the coarse sleeve of the oilskin coat one could infer that the biceps and deltoids were large and powerful. She was coarse-fibred, no doubt, mentally as well as physically, but her coarseness, so Wilbur guessed, would prove to be the coarseness of a primitive rather than of a degenerate character.

One thing he saw clearly during the few moments of the dory's trip between bark and schooner—the fact that his charge was a woman must be kept from Captain Kitchell. Wilbur knew his man by now. It could be done. Kitchell and he would take the *Lady Letty* into the nearest port as soon as possible. The deception would have to be maintained only for a day or two.

He left the girl on board the schooner and returned to the derelict with the axes. He found Kitchell on the house, just returned from a hasty survey of the prize.

"She's a daisy," vociferated the Captain, as Wilbur came aboard. "I've been havin' a look 'round. She's brand-new. See the date on the capst'n-head? Christiania is her hailin' port—built there; but it's her papers I'm after. Then we'll know where we're at. How's the kid?"

"She's all right," answered Wilbur, before he could collect his thoughts. But the Captain thought he had reference to the *Bertha*.

"I mean the kid we found in the wheel-box. He doesn't count in our salvage. The bark's been abandoned as plain as paint. If I thought he stood in our way," and Kitchell's jaw grew salient, "I'd shut him in the cabin with the old man a spell, till he'd copped off. Now then, son, first thing to do is to chop vents in this yere house."

"Hold up—we can do better than that," said Wilbur, restraining Kitchell's fury of impatience. "Slide the big skylight off—it's loose already."

A couple of the schooner's hands were ordered aboard

the *Lady Letty*, and the skylight removed. At first the pour of gas was terrific, but by degrees it abated, and at the end of half an hour Kitchell could keep back no longer.

"Come on!" he cried, catching up an axe; "rot the difference." All the plundering instincts of the man were aroused and clamouring. He had become a very wolf within scent of its prey—a veritable hyena nuzzling about its carrion.

"Lord!" he gasped, "t' think that everything we see, everything we find, is ours!"

Wilbur himself was not far behind him in eagerness. Somewhere deep down in the heart of every Anglo-Saxon lies the predatory instinct of his Viking ancestors—an instinct that a thousand years of respectability and tax-paying have not quite succeeded in eliminating.

A flight of six steps, brass bound and bearing the double L of the bark's monogram, led them down into a sort of vestibule. From the vestibule a door opened directly into the main cabin. They entered.

The cabin was some twenty feet long and unusually spacious. Fresh from his recollection of the grime and reek of the schooner, it struck Wilbur as particularly dainty. It was painted white with stripes of blue, gold, and pea-green. On either side three doors opened off into staterooms and private cabins, and with each roll of the derelict these doors banged like an irregular discharge of revolvers. In the centre was the dining-table, covered with a red cloth, very much awry. On each side of the table were four arm-chairs, screwed to the deck, one somewhat larger at the head. Overhead, in swinging-racks, were glasses and decanters of whiskey and some kind of white wine. But for one feature the sight of the *Letty's* cabin was charming. However, on the floor by the sliding-door in the forward bulkhead lay a body, face upward.

The body was that of a middle-aged, fine-looking man, his head covered with the fur ear-lapped cap that Norwegians affect, even in the tropics. The eyes were wide open, the face discoloured. In the last gasp of suffocation the set of false teeth had been forced halfway out of his mouth, distorting the countenance with a hideous simian grin. Instantly Kitchell's eye was caught by the glint of the gold in which these teeth were set.

"Here's about \$100 to begin with," he exclaimed, and picking up the teeth, dropped them into his pocket with a wink at Wilbur. The body of the dead Captain was passed up through the skylight and laid out on the deck, and Wilbur and Kitchell turned their attention to what had been his stateroom.

The Captain's room was the largest one of the six staterooms opening from the main cabin.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Kitchell as he and Wilbur entered. "The old man's room, and no mistake."

Besides the bunk, the stateroom was fitted up with a lounge of red plush screwed to the bulkhead. A roll of charts leaned in one corner, an alarm clock, stopped at 1:15, stood on a shelf in the company of some dozen paper-covered novels and a drinking-glass full of cigars. Over the lounge, however, was the rack of instruments, sextant, barometer, chronometer, glass, and the like, securely screwed down, while against the wall, in front of a swivel leather chair that was ironed to the deck, was the locked secretary.

"Look at 'em, just look at 'em, will you!" said Kitchell, running his fingers lovingly over the polished brass of the instruments. "There's a thousand dollars of stuff right here. The chronometer's worth five hundred alone, Bennett & Sons' own make." He turned to the secretary.

"Now!" he exclaimed with a long breath.

What followed thrilled Wilbur with alternate excite-

ment, curiosity, and a vivid sense of desecration and sacrilege. For the life of him he could not make the thing seem right or legal in his eyes, and yet he had neither the wish nor the power to stay his hand or interfere with what Kitchell was doing.

The Captain put the blade of the axe in the chink of the secretary's door and wrenched it free. It opened down to form a sort of desk, and disclosed an array of cubby-holes and two small doors, both locked. These latter Kitchell smashed in with the axe-head. Then he seated himself in the swivel chair and began to rifle their contents systematically, Wilbur leaning over his shoulder.

The heat from the coal below them was almost unbearable. In the cabin the six doors kept up a continuous ear-shocking fusillade, as though half a dozen men were fighting with revolvers; from without, down the open skylight, came the sing-song talk of the Chinamen and the wash and ripple of the two vessels, now side by side. The air, foul beyond expression, tasted of brass, their heads swam and ached to bursting, but absorbed in their work they had no thought of the lapse of time nor the discomfort of their surroundings. Twice during the examination of the bark's papers, Kitchell sent Wilbur out into the cabin for the whiskey decanter in the swinging-racks.

"Here's the charter papers," said Kitchell, unfolding and spreading them out one by one; "and here's the clearing papers from Blyth in England. This yere's the insoorance, and there, this is—rot that, nothin' but the articles for the crew—no use to us."

In a separate envelope, carefully sealed and bound, they came upon the Captain's private papers. A marriage certificate setting forth the union between Eilert Sternersen, of Fruholmen, Norway, and Sarah Moran, of some seaport town (the name was undecipherable) of the North of England. Next came a birth certificate

of a daughter named Moran, dated twenty-two years back, and a bill of sale of the bark *Lady Letty*, whereby a two-thirds interest was conveyed from the previous owners (a shipbuilding firm of Christiania) to Capt. Eilert Sternersen.

"The old man was his own boss," commented Kitchell. "Hello!" he remarked, "look here"; a yellowed photograph was in his hand, the picture of a stout, fair-haired woman of about forty, wearing enormous pendant earrings in the style of the early sixties. Below was written: "S. Moran Sternersen, ob. 1867."

"Old woman copped off," said Kitchell, "so much the better for us; no heirs to put in their gab; an'—hold hard—steady all—here's the will, s'help me."

The only items of importance in the will were the confirmation of the wife's death and the expressly stated bequest of "the bark known as, and sailing under, the name of the *Lady Letty* to my only and beloved daughter, Moran."

"Well," said Wilbur.

The Captain sucked his moustache, then furiously, striking the desk with his fist:

"The bark's ours!" There was a certain ring of defiance in his voice. "Damn the will! I ain't so cock-sure about the law, but I'll make sure."

"As how?" said Wilbur.

Kitchell slung the will out of the open port into the sea.

"That's how," he remarked. "I'm the heir. I found the bark; mine she is, an' mine she stays—yours an' mine, that is."

But Wilbur had not even the time to thoroughly enjoy the satisfaction that the Captain's words conveyed, before an idea suddenly presented itself to him. The girl he had found on board of the bark, the ruddy, fair-haired girl of the fine and hardy Norse type. That

was the daughter, of course; that was "Moran." Instantly the situation adjusted itself in his imagination. The two inseparables, father and daughter, sailors both, their lives passed together on shipboard, and the *Lady Letty* their dream, their ambition, a vessel that at last they could call their own.

Then this disastrous voyage—perhaps the first in their new craft—the combustion in the coal—the panic terror of the crew and their desertion of the bark, and the sturdy resolution of the father and daughter to bring the *Letty* in—to work her into port alone. They had failed; the father had died from gas; the girl, at least for the moment, was crazed from its effects. But the bark had not been abandoned. The owner was on board. Kitchell was wrong; she was no derelict; not one penny could they gain by her salvage.

For an instant a wave of bitterest disappointment passed over Wilbur as he saw his \$30,000 dwindling to nothing. Then the instincts of habit reasserted themselves. The taxpayer in him was stronger than the freebooter, after all. He felt that it was his duty to see to it that the girl had her rights. Kitchell must be made aware of the situation—must be told that Moran, the daughter, the Captain's heir, was on board the schooner; that the "kid" found in the wheel-box was a girl. But on second thoughts that would never do. Above all things, the brute Kitchell must not be shown that a girl was aboard the schooner on which he had absolute command, nor, setting the question of Moran's sex aside, must Kitchell know her even as the dead Captain's heir. There was a difference in the men here, and Wilbur appreciated it. Kitchell, the law-abiding taxpayer, was a weakling in comparison with Kitchell, the freebooter and beach comber in sight of his prize.

"Son," said the Captain, making a bundle of all the papers, "take these over to my bunk and hide 'em under

the donkey's breakfast. Stop a bit," he added, as Wilbur started away. "I'll go with you. We'll have to bury the old man."

Throughout all the afternoon the Captain had been drinking the whiskey from the decanter found in the cabin; now he stood up unsteadily, and, raising his glass, exclaimed:

"Sonny, here's to Kitchell, Wilbur & Co., beach combers, un-limited. What do you say, hey?"

"I only want to be sure that we've a right to the bark," answered Wilbur.

"Right to her—ri-high to 'er," hiccoughed the Captain. "Stike me blind, I'd like to see anyone try'n take her away from Alvinza Kitchell now," and he thrust out his chin at Wilbur.

"Well, so much the better, then," said Wilbur, pocketing the papers. The pair ascended to the deck.

The burial of Captain Sternersen was a dreadful business. Kitchell, far gone in whiskey, stood on the house issuing his orders, drinking from one of the decanters he had brought up with him. He had already rifled the dead man's pockets, and had even taken away the boots and fur-lined cap. Cloths were cut from the spanker and rolled around the body. Then Kitchell ordered the peak halyards unrove and used as lashings to tie the canvas around the corpse. The red and white flags (the distress signals) were still bound on the halyards.

"Leave 'em on. Leave 'em on," commanded Kitchell. "Use 'm as a shrou'. All ready now, stan' by to let her go."

Wilbur looked over at the schooner and noted with immense relief that Moran was not in sight. Suddenly an abrupt reaction took place in the Captain's addled brain.

"Can't bury 'um 'ithout 'is teeth," he gabbled

solemnly. He laid back the canvas and replaced the set. "Ole man'd ha'nt me 'f I kep' 's teeth. Strike! look a' that, I put 'em in upside down. Nev' min', upsi' down, downsi' up, whaz odds, all same with ole Bill, hey, ole Bill, all same with you, hey?" Suddenly he began to howl with laughter. "T' think a bein' buried with yo'r teeth upsi' down. Oh, mee, but that's a good grind. Stan' by to heave ole Uncle Bill over—ready, heave, an' away she goes." He ran to the side, waving his hat and looking over. "Goo'-by, ole Bill, by-by. There you go, an' the signal o' distress roun' you, H. B. 'I'm in need of assistance.' Lord, here comes the sharks—look! look! look at um fight! look at um takin' ole Bill! I'm in need of assistance. I sh'd say you were, ole Bill."

Wilbur looked once over the side in the churning, lashing water, then drew back, sick to vomiting. But in less than thirty seconds the water was quiet. Not a shark was in sight.

"Get over t' the *Bertha* with those papers, son," ordered Kitchell; "I'll bide here and dig up sh' more loot. I'll gut this ole pill-box from stern to stem-post 'fore I'll leave. I won't leave a copper rivet in 'er, notta co'er rivet, d'y'hear?" he shouted, his face purple with unnecessary rage.

Wilbur returned to the schooner with the two Chinamen, leaving Kitchell alone on the bark. He found the girl sitting by the rudderhead almost as he had left her, looking about her with vague, unseeing eyes.

"Your name is Moran, isn't it?" he asked. "Moran Sternersen."

"Yes," she said, after a pause, then looked curiously at a bit of tarred rope on the deck. Nothing more could be got out of her. Wilbur talked to her at length, and tried to make her understand the situation, but it was evident she did not follow. However, at each mention of her name she would answer:

"Yes, yes, I'm Moran."

Wilbur turned away from her, biting his nether lip in perplexity.

"Now, what am I going to do?" he muttered. "What a situation! If I tell the Captain, it's all up with the girl. If he didn't kill her, he'd do worse—might do both. If I don't tell him, there goes her birthright, \$60,000, and she alone in the world. It's begun to go already," he added, listening to the sounds that came from the bark. Kitchell was raging to and fro in the cabin in frenzy of drink, axe in hand, smashing glassware, hacking into the woodwork, singing the while at the top of his voice:

"As through the drop I go, drop I go,
As through the drop I go, drop I go,
As through the drop I go,
Down to hell that yawns below.
Twenty stiffs all in a row,
Damn your eyes."

"That's the kind of man I have to deal with," muttered Wilbur. "It's encouraging, and there's no one to talk to. Not much help in a Chinaman and a crazy girl in a man's oilskins. It's about the biggest situation you ever faced, Ross Wilbur, and you're all alone. What the devil are you going to do?"

He acknowledged with considerable humiliation that he could not get the better of Kitchell, either physically or mentally. Kitchell was a more powerful man than he, and cleverer. The Captain was in his element now, and he was the commander. On shore it would have been vastly different. The city-bred fellow, with a policeman always in call, would have known how to act.

"I simply can't stand by and see that hog plundering everything she's got. What's to be done?"

And suddenly, while the words were yet in his mouth, the sun was wiped from the sky like writing from a slate,

the horizon blackened, vanished, a long white line of froth whipped across the sea and came on hissing. A hollow note boomed out, boomed, swelled, and grew rapidly to a roar.

An icy chill stabbed the air. Then the squall swooped and struck, and the sky shut down over the troubled ocean like a pot-lid over a boiling pot. The schooner's fore and main sheets, that had not been made fast, unraveled at the first gust and began to slat wildly in the wind. The Chinamen cowered to the decks, grasping at cleats, stays, and masts. They were helpless—paralyzed with fear. Charlie clung to a stay, one arm over his head, as though dodging a blow. Wilbur gripped the rail with his hands where he stood, his teeth set, his eyes wide, waiting for the foundering of the schooner, his only thought being that the end could not be far. He had heard of the suddenness of tropical squalls, but this had come with the abruptness of a scene-shift at a play. The schooner veered broad-on to the waves. It was the beginning of the end—another roll to the leeward like the last and the Pacific would come aboard.

"And you call yourselves sailor men! Are you going to drown like rats on a plank?" A voice that Wilbur did not know went ringing through that horrid shouting of wind and sea like the call of a bugle. He turned to see Moran, the girl of the *Lady Letty*, standing erect upon the quarterdeck, holding down the schooner's wheel. The confusion of that dreadful moment, that had paralyzed the crew's senses, had brought back hers. She was herself again, savage, splendid, dominant, superb in her wrath at their weakness, their cowardice.

Her heavy brows were knotted over her flaming eyes, her hat was gone, and her thick bands of yellow hair whipped across her face and streamed out in the wind like streamers of the northern lights. As she shouted, gesturing furiously to the men, the loose skin of the

oilskin coat fell back, and showed her forearms, strong, round, and white as scud, the hand and wrist so tanned as to look almost like a glove. And all the while she shouted aloud, furious with indignation, raging against the supineness of the *Bertha's* crew.

"Stand by, men! stand by! Look alive, now! Make fast the stays'l halyards to the dory's warp! Now, then, unreeve y'r halyards! all clear there! pass the end for'd outside the rigging! outside! you fools! Make fast to the bits for'ard—let go y'r line—that'll do. Soh—soh. There, she's coming up."

The dory had been towing astern, and the seas combing over her had swamped her. Moran had been inspired to use the swamped boat as a sea-anchor, fastening her to the schooner's bow instead of to the stern. The *Bertha's* bow, answering to the drag, veered around. The *Bertha* stood head to the seas, riding out the squall. It was a masterpiece of seamanship, conceived and executed in the very thick of peril, and it saved the schooner.

But there was little time to think of themselves. On board the bark the sails were still set. The squall struck the *Lady Letty* squarely aback. She heeled over upon the instant; then as the top hamper carried away with a crash, eased back a moment upon an even keel. But her cargo had shifted. The bark was doomed. Through the flying spray and scud and rain Wilbur had a momentary glimpse of Kitchell, hacking at the lanyards with his axe. Then the *Lady Letty* capsized, going over till her masts were flat with the water, and in another second rolled bottom up. For a moment her keel and red iron bottom were visible through the mist of driving spoon-drift. Suddenly they sank from sight. She was gone.

And then, like the rolling up of a scroll, the squall passed, the sun returned, the sky burned back to blue, the ruggedness was smoothed from the ocean, and the

MORAN OF THE LADY LETTY

warmth of the tropics closed around the *Bertha Millner*, once more rolling easily on the swell of the ocean.

Of the *Lady Letty* and the drunken beach-combing Captain not a trace remained. Kitchell had gone down with his prize. The *Bertha Millner's* Chinese crew huddled forward, talking wildly, pointing and looking in a bewildered fashion over the sides.

Wilbur and Moran were left alone on the open Pacific.

CHAPTER V

A GIRL CAPTAIN

WHEN Wilbur came on deck the morning after the sinking of the bark he was surprised to find the schooner under way again. Wilbur and Charlie had berthed forward during that night—Charlie with the hands, Wilbur in the Captain's hammock. The reason for this change of quarters had been found in a peremptory order from Moran during the dog-watch the preceding evening.

She had looked squarely at Wilbur from under her scowl, and had said briefly and in a fine contralto voice, that he had for the first time noted: "I berth aft, in the cabin; you and the Chinaman forward. Understand?"

Moran had only forestalled Wilbur's intention; while after her almost miraculous piece of seamanship in the rescue of the schooner, Charlie and the Chinese crew accorded her a respect that was almost superstitious.

Wilbur met her again at breakfast. She was still wearing men's clothing—part of Kitchell's outfit—and was booted to the knee; but now she wore no hat, and her enormous mane of rye-coloured hair was braided into long strands near to the thickness of a man's arm. The redness of her face gave a startling effect to her pale blue eyes and sandy, heavy eyebrows, that easily lowered to a frown. She ate with her knife, and after pushing away her plate Wilbur observed that she drank half a tumbler of whiskey and water.

The conversation between the two was tame enough.

There was no common ground upon which they could meet. To her father's death—no doubt an old matter even before her rescue—she made no allusion. Her attitude toward Wilbur was one of defiance and suspicion. Only once did she relax:

"How did you come to be aboard here with these rat-eaters—you're no sailor?" she said abruptly.

"Huh!" laughed Wilbur, mirthlessly; "huh! I was shanghaied."

Moran smote the table with a red fist, and shouted with sonorous, bell-toned laughter:

"Shanghaied?—you? Now, that is really good. And what are you going to do now?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Signal the first home-bound vessel and be taken into Frisco. I've my insurance to collect (Wilbur had given her the *Letty's* papers) and the disaster to report."

"Well, I'm not keen on shark-hunting myself," said Wilbur. But Moran showed no interest in his plans.

However, they soon found that they were not to be permitted to signal. At noon the same day the schooner sighted a steamship's smoke on the horizon, and began to raise her rapidly. Moran immediately bound on the ensign, union down, and broke it out at the peak.

Charlie, who was at the wheel, spoke a sentence in Chinese, and one of the hands drew his knife across the halyards and brought the distress signal to the deck. Moran turned upon Charlie with an oath, her brows knotted.

"No! No!" sang Charlie, closing his eyes and wagging his head. "No! Too muchee los' time; no can stop. You come down-side cabin; you an' one-piece boss number two (this was Wilbur) have um chin-chin."

The odd conclave assembled about Kitchell's table—the clubman, the half-masculine girl in men's clothes, and the Chinaman. The conference was an angry one,

Wilbur and Moran insisting that they be put aboard the steamship, Charlie refusing with calm obstinacy.

"I have um chin-chin with China boys las' nigh'. China boy heap flaid, no can stop um steamship. Heap flaid too much talkee-talkee. No stop; go fish now; go fish chop-chop. Los' heap time; go fish. I no savvy sail um boat, China boy no savvy sail um boat. I tink um you savvy (and he pointed to Moran). I tink um you savvy plenty heap much disa bay. Boss number two, no savvy sail um boat, but him savvy plenty many all same."

"And we're to stop on board your dough-dish and navigate her for you?" shouted Moran, her face blazing.

Charlie nodded blandly: "I tink um yas."

"And when we get back to port," exclaimed Wilbur, "you think, perhaps, I—we won't make it interesting for you?"

Charlie smiled.

"I tink um Six Company heap rich."

"Well, get along," ordered Moran, as though the schooner was her property, "and we'll talk it over."

"China boy lika you heap pretty big," said Charlie to Moran, as he went out. "You savvy sail um boat all light; wanta you fo' captain. But," he added, suddenly dropping his bland passivity as though it were a mask, and for an instant allowing the wicked, malevolent Cantonese to come to the surface, "China boy no likee funnee business, savvy?" Then with the smile of a Talleyrand he disappeared.

Moran and Wilbur were helpless for the present. They were but two against seven Chinamen. They must stay on board, if the coolies wished it; and if they were to stay it was a matter of their own personal safety that the *Bertha Millner* should be properly navigated.

"I'll captain her," concluded Moran, sullenly, at the

end of their talk. "You must act as mate, Mr. Wilbur. And don't get any mistaken idea into your head that, because I'm a young girl and alone, you are going to run things your way. I don't like funny business any better than Charlie."

"Look here," said Wilbur, complaining, "don't think I'm altogether a villain. I think you're a ripping fine girl. You're different from any kind of girl I ever met, of course, but you, by jingo, you're—you're splendid. There in the squall last evening, when you stood at the wheel, with your hair——"

"Oh, drop that!" said the girl, contemptuously, and went up on deck. Wilbur followed, scratching an ear.

Charlie was called aft and their decision announced. Moran would navigate the *Bertha Millner*, Wilbur and she taking the watches. Charlie promised that he would answer for the obedience of the men.

Their first concern now was to shape their course for Magdalena Bay. Moran and Wilbur looked over Kit-chell's charts and log-book, but the girl flung them aside disdainfully.

"He's been sailing by dead reckoning, and his navigation is drivel. Why, a cabin-boy would know better; and, to end with, the chronometer is run down. I'll have to get Green'ich time by taking the altitude of a star to-night, and figure out our longitude. Did you bring off our sextant?"

Wilbur shook his head. "Only the papers," he said.

"There's only an old ebony quadrant here," said Moran, "but it will have to do."

That night, lying flat on her back on the deck with the quadrant to her eye, she "got a star and brought it down to the horizon," and sat up under the reeking lamp in the cabin nearly the whole night ciphering and ciphering till she had filled up the four sides of the log-slate with her calculations. However, by daylight she

had obtained the correct Greenwich time and worked the schooner's longitude.

Two days passed, then a third. Moran set the schooner's course. She kept almost entirely to herself, and when not at the wheel or taking the sun or writing up the log, gloomed over the after-rail into the schooner's wake. Wilbur knew not what to think of her. Never in his life had he met with any girl like this. So accustomed had she been to the rough, give-and-take, direct associations of a seafaring life that she misinterpreted well-meant politeness—the only respect he knew how to pay her—to mean insidious advances. She was suspicious of him—distrusted him utterly, and openly ridiculed his abortive seamanship. Pretty she was not, but she soon began to have a certain amount of attraction for Wilbur. He liked her splendid ropes of hair, her heavy contralto voice, her fine animal strength of bone and muscle (admittedly greater than his own); he admired her indomitable courage and self-reliance, while her positive genius in the matters of seamanship and navigation filled him with speechless wonder. The girls he had been used to were clever only in their knowledge of the amenities of an afternoon call or the formalities of a paper german. A girl of two-and-twenty who could calculate longitude from the altitude of a star was outside his experience. The more he saw of her the more he knew himself to have been right in his first estimate. She drank whiskey after her meals, and when angry, which was often, swore like a buccaneer. As yet she was almost, as one might say, without sex—savage, unconquered, untamed, glorying in her own independence, her sullen isolation. Her neck was thick, strong, and very white, her hands roughened and calloused. In her men's clothes she looked tall, vigorous, and unrestrained, and on more than one occasion, as Wilbur passed close to her, he was made aware that her hair, her neck, her entire person-

ality exhaled a fine, sweet, natural redolence that savoured of the ocean and great winds.

One day, as he saw her handling a huge water-barrel by the chines only, with a strength he knew to be greater than his own, her brows contracted with the effort, her hair curling about her thick neck, her large, round arms bare to the elbow, a sudden thrill of enthusiasm smote through him, and between his teeth he exclaimed to himself:

"By Jove, you're a woman!"

The *Bertha Millner* continued to the southward, gliding quietly over the oil-smoothness of the ocean under airs so light as hardly to ruffle the surface. Sometimes at high noon the shimmer of the ocean floor blended into the shimmer of the sky at the horizon, and then it was no longer water and blue heavens; the little craft seemed to be poised in a vast crystalline sphere, where there was neither height nor depth—poised motionless in warm, coruscating, opalescent space, alone with the sun.

At length one morning the schooner, which for the preceding twenty-four hours had been heading eastward, raised the land, and by the middle of the afternoon had come up to within a mile of a low, sandy shore, quivering with heat, and had tied up to the kelp in Magdalena Bay.

Charlie now took over entire charge of operations. For two days previous the Chinese hands had been getting out the deck-tubs, tackles, gaffs, spades, and the other shark-fishing gear that had been stowed forward. The sails were lowered and gasketed, the decks cleared of all impedimenta, hogsheads and huge vats stood ready in the waist, and the lazy indolence of the previous week was replaced by an extraordinary activity.

The day after their arrival in the bay was occupied by all hands in catching bait. This bait was a kind of

rock-fish, of a beautiful red gold colour, and about the size of an ordinary cod. They bit readily enough, but out of every ten hooked three were taken off the lines by the sharks before they could be brought aboard. Another difficulty lay in the fact that, either because of the excessive heat in the air or the percentage of alkali in the water, they spoiled almost immediately if left in the air.

Turtle were everywhere—floating gray-green discs just under the surface. Sea-birds in clouds clamoured all day long about the shore and sand-spits. At long intervals flying-fish skittered over the water like skipping-stones. Shoals of porpoises came in from outside, leaping clumsily along the edges of the kelp. Bewildered land-birds perched on the schooner's rigging, and in the early mornings the whistling of quail could be heard on shore near where a little fresh-water stream ran down to meet the ocean.

It was Wilbur who caught the first shark on the second morning of the *Bertha's* advent in Magdalena Bay. A store of bait had been accumulated, split and halved into chunks for the shark-hooks, and Wilbur, baiting one of the huge lines that had been brought up on deck the evening before, flung it overboard, and watched the glimmer of the white fish-meat turning to a silvery green as it sank down among the kelp. Almost instantly a long moving shadow, just darker than the blue-green mass of the water, identified itself at a little distance.

Enormous flukes proceeded from either side, an erect dorsal fin, like an enormous cock's crest, rose from the back, while immediately over the head swam the two pilot-fish, following so clearly the movement of the shark as to give the impression of actually adhering to his body. Twice and three times the great man-eater, twelve feet from snout to tail-tip, circled slowly about

the bait, the flukes moving fan-like through the water. Once he came up, touched the bait with his nose, and backed easily away. He disappeared, returned, and poised himself motionless in the schooner's shadow, feeling the water with his flukes.

Moran was looking over Wilbur's shoulder. "He's as good as caught," she muttered; "once let them get sight of meat, and—— Steady now!" The shark moved forward. Suddenly, with a long easy roll, he turned completely upon his back. His white belly flashed like silver in the water—the bait disappeared.

"You've got him!" shouted Moran.

The rope slid through Wilbur's palms, burning the skin as the huge sea-wolf sounded. Moran laid hold. The heavy, sullen wrenching from below twitched and swayed their bodies and threw them against each other. Her bare, cool arm was pressed close over his knuckles.

"Heave!" she cried, laughing with the excitement of the moment. "Heave all!"—she began the chant of sailors hauling at the ropes. Together, and bracing their feet against the schooner's rail, they fought out the fight with the great fish. In a swirl of lather the head and shoulders came above the surface, the flukes churning the water till it boiled like the wake of a screw steamship. But as soon as these great fins were clear of the surface the shark fell quiet and helpless.

Charlie came up with the cutting-in spade, and as the fish hung still over the side, cut him open from neck to belly with a single movement. Another Chinaman stood by with a long-handled gaff, hooked out the purple-black liver, brought it over the side, and dropped it into one of the deck-tubs. The shark thrashed and writhed, his flukes quivering and his gills distended. Wilbur could not restrain an exclamation.

"Brutal business!" he muttered.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Moran, scornfully, "cutting-in

is too good for him. Sailor-folk are no friends of such carrion as that."

Other lines were baited and dropped overboard, and the hands settled themselves to the real business of the expedition. There was no skill in the matter. The sharks bit ravenously, and soon swarmed about the schooner in hundreds. Hardly a half minute passed that one of the four Chinamen that were fishing did not signal a catch, and Charlie and Jim were kept busy with spade and gaff. By noon the deck-tubs were full. The lines were hauled in, and the hands set the tubs in the sun to try out the oil. Under the tropical heat the shark livers almost visibly melted away, and by 4 o'clock in the afternoon the tubs were full of a thick, yellow oil, the reek of which instantly recalled to Wilbur's mind the rancid smell of the schooner on the day when he had first come aboard of her. The deck-tubs were emptied into the hogsheads and vats that stood in the waist of the *Bertha*, the tubs scoured, and the lines and bent shark-hooks overhauled. Charlie disappeared in the galley, supper was cooked, and eaten upon deck under the conflagration of the sunset; the lights were set, the Chinamen foregathered in the fo'c'sle head, smoking opium, and by eight o'clock the routine of the day was at an end.

So the time passed. In a short time Wilbur could not have said whether the day was Wednesday or Sunday. He soon tired of the unsportsmanlike work of killing the sluggish brutes, and turned shoreward to relieve the monotony of the succeeding days. He and Moran were left a good deal to their own devices. Charlie was the master of the men now. "Mate," said Moran to Wilbur one day, after a dinner of turtle steaks and fish, eaten in the open air on the quarterdeck; "mate, this is slow work, and the schooner smells terribly foul. We'll have the dory out and go ashore. We can tumble a cask into

her and get some water. The butt's three-quarters empty. Let's see how it feels to be in Mexico."

"Mexico?" said Wilbur. "That's so—Lower California is Mexico. I'd forgotten that!"

They went ashore and spent the afternoon in filling the water-cask from the fresh-water stream and in gathering abalones, which Moran declared were delicious eating, from the rocks left bare by the tide. But nothing could have exceeded the loneliness of that shore and backland, palpitating under the flogging of a tropical sun. Low hills of sand, covered with brush, stretched back from the shore. On the eastern horizon, leagues distant, blue masses of mountains, striated with mirages, swam in the scorching air.

The sand was like fire to the touch. Far out in the bay the schooner hung motionless under bare sticks, resting apparently upon her inverted shadow only. And that was all—the flat, heat-ridden land, the sheen of the open Pacific, and the lonely schooner.

"Quiet enough," said Wilbur, in a low voice, wondering if there was such a place as San Francisco, with its paved streets and cable cars, and if people who had been his friends there had ever had any real existence.

"Do you like it?" asked Moran quickly, facing him, her thumbs in her belt.

"It's good fun—how about you?"

"It's no different than the only life I've known. I suppose you think it's a queer kind of life for a girl. I've lived by doing things, not by thinking things, or reading about what other people have done or thought; and I guess it's what you do that counts, rather than what you think or read about. Where's that pinch-bar? We'll get a couple more abalones for supper, and then put off."

That was the only talk of moment they had during the afternoon. All the rest of their conversation had been

of those things that immediately occupied their attention.

They regained the schooner toward five o'clock, to find the Chinamen perplexed and mystified. No explanation was forthcoming, and Charlie gave them supper in preoccupied silence. As they were eating the abalones, which Moran had fried in batter, Charlie said:

"Shark all gone! No more catch um—him all gone."

"Gone—why?"

"No savvy," said Charlie. "No likee, no likee. China boy tink um heap funny, too much heap funny."

It was true. During all the next day not a shark was in sight, and though the crew fished assiduously till dark, they were rewarded by not so much as a bite. No one could offer any explanation.

"'Tis strange," said Moran. "Never heard of shark leaving this feed before. And you can see with half an eye that the hands don't like the looks of it. Superstitious beggars! they need to be clumped in the head."

That same night Wilbur woke in his hammock on the fo'c'sle head about half-past two. The moon was down, the sky one powder of stars. There was not a breath of wind. It was so still that he could hear some large fish playing and breaking off toward the shore. Then, without the least warning, he felt the schooner begin to lift under him. He rolled out of his hammock and stood on the deck. There could be no doubt of it—the whole forepart was rising beneath him. He could see the bowsprit moving upward from star to star. Still the schooner lifted; objects on deck began to slide aft; the oil in the deck-tubs washed over; then, as there came a wild scrambling of the Chinese crew up the fo'c'sle hatch, she settled again gradually at first, then, with an abrupt lurch that almost threw him from his feet, regained her level. Moran met him in the waist. Charlie came running aft.

MORAN OF THE LADY LETTY

"What was that? Are we grounding? Has she struck?"

"No, no; we're still fast to the kelp. Was it a tidal wave?"

"Nonsense. It wouldn't have handled us that way."

"Well, what was it? Listen! For God's sake keep quiet there forward!"

Wilbur looked over the side into the water. The ripples were still chasing themselves away from the schooner. There was nothing else. The stillness shut down again. There was not a sound.

CHAPTER VI

A SEA MYSTERY

IN SPITE of his best efforts at self-control, Wilbur felt a slow, cold clutch at his heart. That sickening, uncanny lifting of the schooner out of the glassy water, at a time when there was not enough wind to so much as wrinkle the surface, sent a creep of something very like horror through all his flesh.

Again he peered over the side, down into the kelp-thickened sea. Nothing—not a breath of air was stirring. The gray light that flooded down from the stars showed not a break upon the surface of Magdalena Bay. On shore, nothing moved.

“Quiet there, forward,” called Moran to the shrill-voiced coolies.

The succeeding stillness was profound. All on board listened intently. The water dripped like the ticking of a clock from the *Bertha Millner's* stern, which with the rising of the bow had sunk almost to the rail. There was no other sound.

“Strange,” muttered Moran, her brows contracting.

Charlie broke the silence with a wail: “No likee, no likee!” he cried at top voice.

The man had gone suddenly green; Wilbur could see the shine of his eyes distended like those of a harassed cat. As he, Moran, and Wilbur stood in the schooner's waist, staring at each other, the smell of punk came to their nostrils. Forward, the coolies were already burning joss-sticks on the fo'c'sle head, kowtowing their foreheads to the deck.

Moran went forward and kicked them to their feet and hurled their joss-sticks into the sea.

"Feng shui! Feng shui!" they exclaimed with bated breaths. "The Feng shui no likee we."

Low in the east the horizon began to blacken against the sky. It was early morning. A watch was set, the Chinamen sent below, and until daybreak, when Charlie began to make a clattering of tins in the galley as he set about preparing breakfast, Wilbur paced the rounds of the schooner, looking, listening, and waiting again for that slow, horrifying lift. But the rest of the night was without incident.

After breakfast, the strangely assorted trio—Charlie, Moran, and Wilbur—held another conference in the cabin. It was decided to move the schooner to the other side of the bay.

"Feng shui in disa place, no likee we," announced Charlie.

"Feng shui, who are they?"

Charlie promptly became incoherent on this subject, and Moran and Wilbur could only guess that the Feng shui were the tutelary deities that presided over that portion of Magdalena Bay. At any rate, there were evidently no more shark to be caught in that fishing-ground, so sail was made, and by noon the *Bertha Millner* tied up to the kelp on the opposite side of the inlet, about half a mile from the shore.

The shark were plentiful here, and the fishing went forward again as before. Certain of these shark were hauled aboard, stunned by a blow on the nose, and their fins cut off. The Chinamen packed these fins away in separate kegs. Eventually they would be sent to China.

Two or three days passed. The hands kept steadily at their work. Nothing more occurred to disturb the monotony of the scorching days and soundless nights;

the schooner sat as easily on the unbroken water as though built to the bottom. Soon the night watch was discontinued. During these days the three officers lived high. Turtle were plentiful, and what with their steaks and soups, the fried abalones, the sea-fish, the really delicious shark-fins, and the quail that Charlie and Wilbur trapped along the shore, the trio had nothing to wish for in the way of table luxuries.

The shore was absolutely deserted, as well as the back country—an unbroken wilderness of sand and sage. Half a dozen times, Wilbur, wearying of his inaction aboard the schooner, made the entire circuit of the bay from point to point. Standing on one of the latter projections and looking out to the west, the Pacific appeared as empty of life as the land. Never a keel cut those waters, never a sail broke the edge of the horizon, never a feather of smoke spotted the sky where it whitened to meet the sea. Everything was empty—vast, unspeakably desolate—palpitating with heat.

Another week passed. Charlie began to complain that the shark were growing scarce again.

“I think bime-by him go’ way, once a mo’.”

That same night, Wilbur, lying in his hammock, was awakened by a touch on his arm. He woke to see Moran beside him on the deck.

“Did you hear anything?” she said in a low voice, looking at him under her scowl.

“No! no!” he exclaimed, getting up, reaching for his wicker sandals. “Did you?”

“I thought so—something. Did you feel anything?”

“I’ve been asleep, I haven’t noticed anything. Is it beginning again?”

“The schooner lifted again, just now, very gently. I happened to be awake or I wouldn’t have noticed it.” They were talking in low voices, as is the custom of people speaking in the dark.

"There, what's that?" exclaimed Wilbur under his breath. A gentle vibration, barely perceptible, thrilled through the schooner. Under his hand, that was clasped upon the rail, Wilbur could feel a faint trembling in her frame. It stopped, began again, and died slowly away.

"Well, what the devil *is* it?" he muttered impatiently, trying to master the returning creep of dread.

Moran shook her head, biting her lip.

"It's beyond *me*," she said, frowning. "Can you see anything?" The sky, sea, and land were unbroken reaches of solitude. There was no breath of wind.

"Listen," said Moran. Far off to landward came the faint, sleepy clucking of a quail, and the stridulating of unnumbered crickets; a long ripple licked the slope of the beach and slid back into the ocean. Wilbur shook his head.

"Don't hear anything," he whispered. "Sh—there—she's trembling again."

Once more a prolonged but faint quivering ran through the *Bertha Millner* from stem to stern, and from keel to masthead. There was a barely audible creaking of joints and panels. The oil in the deck-tubs trembled. The vibration was so fine and rapid that it tickled the soles of Wilbur's feet as he stood on the deck.

"I'd give two fingers to know what it all means," murmured Moran in a low voice. "I've been to sea for——" Then suddenly she cried aloud: "Steady all, she's lifting again!"

The schooner heaved slowly under them, this time by the stern. Up she went, up and up, while Wilbur gripped at a stay to keep his place, and tried to choke down his heart, that seemed to beat against his palate.

"God!" ejaculated Moran, her eyes blazing. "This thing is——" The *Bertha* came suddenly down to an easy keel, rocking in that glassy sea as if in a tide rip. The deck was awash with oil. Far out in the bay the

ripples widening from the schooner blurred the reflections of the stars. The Chinamen swarmed up the hatchway, voluble and shrill. Again the *Bertha Millner* lifted and sank, the tubs sliding on the deck, the masts quivering like reeds, the timbers groaning aloud with the strain. In the stern something cracked and smashed. Then the trouble died away, the ripples faded into the ocean, and the schooner settled to her keel, quite motionless.

"Look," said Moran, her face toward the *Bertha's* stern. "The rudder is out of the gudgeons." It was true—the *Bertha Millner's* helm was unshipped.

There was no more sleep for anyone on board that night. Wilbur tramped the quarterdeck, sick with a feeling he dared not put a name to. Moran sat by the wrecked rudder-head, a useless pistol in her hand, swearing under her breath from time to time. Charlie appeared on the quarterdeck at intervals, looked at Wilbur and Moran with wide-open eyes, and then took himself away. On the forward deck the coolies pasted strips of red paper inscribed with mottoes upon the mast, and filled the air with the reek of their joss-sticks.

"If one could only *see* what it was," growled Moran between her clenched teeth. "But this—this damned heaving and trembling, it—it's queer."

"That's it, that's it," said Wilbur quickly, facing her. "What are we going to do, Moran?"

"*Stick it out!*" she exclaimed, striking her knee with her fist. "We can't leave the schooner—I *won't* leave her. I'll stay by this dough-dish as long as two planks in her hold together. Were you thinking of cutting away?" She fixed him with her frown.

Wilbur looked at her, sitting erect by the disabled rudder, her head bare, her braids of yellow hair hanging over her breast, sitting there in man's clothes and man's boots, the pistol at her side. He shook his head.

"I'm not leaving the *Bertha* till you do," he answered; adding: "I'll stand by you, mate, until we——"

"Feel that?" said Moran, holding up a hand.

A fine, quivering tremble was thrilling through every beam of the schooner, vibrating each rope like a harp-string. It passed away; but before either Wilbur or Moran could comment upon it, it recommenced, this time much more perceptibly. Charlie dashed aft, his queue flying.

"W'at makum heap shake?" he shouted; "w'at for him shake? No savvy, no likee, pretty much heap flaid; aie-yah, aie-yah!"

Slowly the schooner heaved up as though upon the crest of some huge wave, slowly it settled, and again gradually lifted, till Wilbur had to catch at the rail to steady his footing. The quivering sensation increased so that their very teeth chattered with it. Below in the cabin they could hear small objects falling from the shelves and table. Then with a sudden drop the *Bertha* fell back to her keel again, the spilled oil spouting from her scuppers, the masts rocking, the water churning and splashing from her sides.

And that was all. There was no sound—nothing was in sight. There was only the frightened trembling of the little schooner and that long, slow heave and lift.

Morning came, and breakfast was had in silence and grim perplexity. It was too late to think of getting away, now that the rudder was disabled. The *Bertha Millner* must bide where she was.

"And a little more of this dancing," exclaimed Moran, "and we'll have the planks springing off the stern-post."

Charlie nodded solemnly. He said nothing—his gravity had returned. Now in the glare of the tropical day, with the *Bertha Millner* sitting the sea as placidly as a brooding gull, he was Talleyrand again.

"I tink um yas," he said vaguely.

"Well, *I* think we had better try and fix the rudder and put back to Frisco," said Moran. "You're making no money this way. There are no shark to be caught. *Something's* wrong. They're gone away somewhere. The crew are eating their heads off and not earning enough money to pay for their keep. What do you think?"

"I tink um yas."

"Then we'll go home. Is that it?"

"I tink um yas—to-molla."

"To-morrow?"

"Yas."

"That's settled then," persisted Moran, surprised at his ready acquiescence; "we start home to-morrow?" Charlie nodded.

"To-molla," he said.

The rudder was not so badly damaged as they had at first supposed; the break was easily mended, but it was found necessary for one of the men to go over the side.

"Get over the side here, Jim," commanded Moran. "Charlie, tell him what's wanted; we can't work the pintle in from the deck."

But Charlie shook his head.

"Him no likee go; him plenty much flaid."

Moran ripped out an oath.

"What do I care if he's afraid! I want him to shove the pintle into the lower gudgeon. My God," she exclaimed, with immense contempt, "what carrion! I'd sooner work a boat with she-monkeys. Mr. Wilbur, I shall have to ask you to go over. I thought I was captain here, but it all depends on whether these rats are afraid or not."

"Plenty many shark," expostulated Charlie. "Him flaid shark come back, catch um chop-chop."

"Stand by here with a couple of cutting-in spades," cried Moran, "and fend off if you see any shark; now, then, are you ready, mate?"

Wilbur took his determination in both hands, threw off his coat and sandals, and went over the stern rail.

"Put your ear to the water," called Moran from above; "sometimes you can hear their flukes."

It took but a minute to adjust the pintle, and Wilbur regained the deck again, dripping and a little pale. He knew not what horrid form of death might have been lurking for him down below there underneath the kelp. As he started forward for dry clothes he was surprised to observe that Moran was smiling at him, holding out her hand.

"That was well done," she said, "and thank you. I've seen older sailor-men than you who wouldn't have taken the risk." Never before had she appeared more splendid in his eyes than at this moment. After changing his clothes in the fo'c'sle, he sat for a long time, his chin in his hands, very thoughtful. Then at length, as though voicing the conclusion of his reflections, said aloud, as he rose to his feet:

"But, of course, *that* is out of the question."

He remembered that they were going home on the next day. Within a fortnight he would be in San Francisco again—a taxpayer, a police-protected citizen once more. It had been good fun, after all, this three weeks' life on the *Bertha Millner*, a strange episode cut out from the normal circle of his conventional life. He ran over the incidents of the cruise—Kitchell, the turtle hunt, the finding of the derelict, the dead captain, the squall, and the awful sight of the sinking bark, Moran at the wheel, the gruesome business of the shark-fishing, and last of all that inexplicable lifting and quivering of the schooner. He told himself that now he would probably never know the explanation of that mystery.

The day passed in preparations to put to sea again. The deck-tubs and hogsheads were stowed below and the tackle cleared away. By evening all was ready; they

would be under way by daybreak the next morning. There was a possibility of their being forced to tow the schooner out by means of the dory, so light were the airs inside. Once beyond the heads, however, they were sure of a breeze.

About ten o'clock that night, the same uncanny trembling ran through the schooner again, and about half an hour later she lifted gently once or twice. But after that she was undisturbed.

Later on in the night—or rather early in the morning—Wilbur woke suddenly in his hammock without knowing why, and got up and stood listening. The *Bertha Millner* was absolutely quiet. The night was hot and still; the new moon, canted over like a sinking galleon, was low over the horizon. Wilbur listened intently, for now at last he heard something.

Between the schooner and the shore a gentle sound of splashing came to his ears, and an occasional crack as of oars in their locks. Was it possible that a boat was there between the schooner and the land? What boat, and manned by whom?

The creaking of oarlocks and the dip of paddles was unmistakable.

Suddenly Wilbur raised his voice in a great shout:

"Boat ahoy!"

There was no answer; the noise of oars grew fainter. Moran came running out of her cabin, swinging into her coat as she ran.

"What is it—what is it?"

"A boat, I think, right off the schooner here. Hark—there—did you hear the oars?"

"You're right; call the hands, get the dory over, we'll follow that boat right up. Hello, forward there, Charlie, all hands, tumble out!"

Then Wilbur and Moran caught themselves looking into each other's eyes. At once something—perhaps the

latent silence of the schooner—told them there was to be no answer. The two ran forward; Moran swung herself into the fo’c’sle hatch, and without using the ladder dropped to the deck below. In an instant her voice came up to the hatch:

“The bunks are empty—they’re gone—abandoned us.” She came up the ladder again.

“Look,” said Wilbur, as she regained the deck. “The dory’s gone; they’ve taken it. It was our only boat; *we* can’t get ashore.”

“Cowardly, superstitious rats, I should have expected this. They would be chopped in bits before they would stay longer on board this boat—they and their Feng-shui.”

When morning came the deserters could be made out camped on the shore, near to the beached dory. What their intentions were could not be conjectured. Ridden with all manner of nameless Oriental superstitions, it was evident that the Chinamen preferred any hazard of fortune to remaining longer upon the schooner.

“Well, can we get along without them?” said Wilbur. “Can we two work the schooner back to port ourselves?”

“We’ll try it on, anyhow, mate,” said Moran; “we might get her into San Diego, anyhow.”

The Chinamen had left plenty of provisions on board, and Moran cooked breakfast. Fortunately, by eight o’clock a very light westerly breeze came up. Moran and Wilbur cast off the gaskets and set the fore and main sails.

Wilbur was busy at the forward bitts preparing to cast loose from the kelp, and Moran had taken up her position at the wheel, when suddenly she exclaimed:

“Sail ho!—and in God’s name what kind of a sail do you call it?”

In fact, a strange-looking craft had just made her appearance at the entrance of Magdalena Bay.

CHAPTER VII

BEACH COMBERS

WILBUR returned aft and joined Moran on the quarterdeck. She was already studying the stranger through the glass.

"That's a new build of boat to me," she muttered, giving Wilbur the glass. Wilbur looked long and carefully. The newcomer was of the size and much the same shape as a caravel of the fifteenth century—high as to bow and stern, and to all appearances as seaworthy as a soup-tureen. Never but in the old prints had Wilbur seen such an extraordinary boat. She carried a single mast, which listed forward; her lugsail was stretched upon dozens of bamboo yards; she drew hardly any water. Two enormous red eyes were painted upon either side of her high, blunt bow, while just abaft the waist projected an enormous oar, or sweep, fully forty feet in length—longer, in fact, than the vessel herself. It acted partly as a propeller, partly as a rudder.

"They're heading for us," commented Wilbur as Moran took the glass again.

"Right," she answered; adding upon the moment: "Huh! more Chinamen; the thing is alive with coolies; she's a junk."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wilbur, recollecting some talk of Charlie's he had overheard. "I know."

"You know?"

"Yes; these are real beach combers. I've heard of them along this coast—heard our Chinamen speak of them.

They beach that junk every night and camp on shore. They're scavengers, as you might say—pick up what they can find or plunder along shore—abalones, shark-fins, pickings of wrecks, old brass and copper, seals, perhaps, turtle and shell. Between whiles they fish for shrimp, and I've heard Kitchell tell how they make pearls by dropping bird-shot into oysters. They are Kai-gingh to a man, and, according to Kitchell, the wickedest breed of cats that ever cut teeth."

The junk bore slowly down upon the schooner. In a few moments she had hove to alongside. But for the enormous red eyes upon her bow she was innocent of paint. She was grimed and shellacked with dirt and grease, and smelt abominably. Her crew were Chinamen; but such Chinamen! The coolies of the *Bertha Millner* were pampered and effete in comparison. The beach combers, thirteen in number, were a smaller class of men, their faces almost black with tan and dirt. Though they still wore the queue, their heads were not shaven, and mats and mops of stiff black hair fell over their eyes from under their broad, basket-shaped hats.

They were barefoot. None of them wore more than two garments—the jeans and the blouse. They were the lowest type of men Wilbur had ever seen. The faces were those of a higher order of anthropoid apes: the lower portion—jaws, lips, and teeth—salient; the nostrils opening at almost right angles, the eyes tiny and bright, the forehead seamed and wrinkled—unnaturally old. Their general expression was one of simian cunning and a ferocity that was utterly devoid of courage.

"Aye!" exclaimed Moran between her teeth, "if the devil were a shepherd, here are his sheep. You don't come aboard this schooner, my friends! I want to live as long as I can, and die when I can't help it. Boat ahoy!" she called.

An answer in Cantonese sing-song came back from

the junk, and the speaker gestured toward the outside ocean.

Then a long parleying began. For upward of half an hour Moran and Wilbur listened to a proposition in broken pigeon-English made by the beach combers again and again and yet again, and were in no way enlightened. It was impossible to understand. Then at last they made out that there was question of a whale. Next it appeared the whale was dead; and finally, after a prolonged pantomime of gesturing and pointing, Moran guessed that the beach combers wanted the use of the *Bertha Millner* to trice up the dead leviathan while the oil and whalebone were extracted.

"That must be it," she said to Wilbur. "That's what they mean by pointing to our masts and tackle. You see, they couldn't manage with that stick of theirs, and they say they'll give us a third of the loot. We'll do it, mate, and I'll tell you why. The wind has fallen, and they can tow us out. If it's a sperm-whale they've found, there ought to be thirty or forty barrels of oil in him, let alone the blubber and bone. Oil is at \$50 now, and spermaceti will always bring \$100. We'll take it on, mate, but we'll keep our eyes on the rats all the time. I don't want them aboard at all. Look at their belts. Not three out of the dozen who aren't carrying those filthy little hatchets. Faugh!" she exclaimed, with a shudder of disgust. "Such vipers!"

What followed proved that Moran had guessed correctly. A rope was passed to the *Bertha Millner*, the junk put out its sweep, and to a wailing, eldritch chanting the schooner was towed out of the bay.

"I wonder what Charlie and our China boys will think of this?" said Wilbur, looking shoreward, where the deserters could be seen gathered together in a silent, observing group.

"We're well shut of them," growled Moran, her

thumbs in her belt. "Only, now we'll never know what was the matter with the schooner these last few nights. Hah!" she exclaimed under her breath, her scowl thickening, "sometimes I don't wonder the beasts cut."

The dead whale was lying four miles out of the entrance of Magdalena Bay, and as the junk and the schooner drew near seemed like a huge black boat floating bottom up. Over it and upon it swarmed and clamoured thousands of sea-birds, while all around and below the water was thick with gorging sharks. A dreadful, strangling decay fouled all the air.

The whale was a sperm-whale, and fully twice the length of the *Bertha Millner*. The work of tricing him up occupied the beach combers throughout the entire day. It was out of the question to keep them off the schooner, and Wilbur and Moran were too wise to try. They swarmed the forward deck and rigging like a plague of unclean monkeys, climbing with an agility and nimbleness that made Wilbur sick to his stomach. They were unlike any Chinaman he had ever seen—hideous to a degree that he had imagined impossible in a human being. On two occasions a fight developed, and in an instant the little hatchets were flashing like the flash of a snake's fangs. Toward the end of the day one of them returned to the junk, screaming like a stuck pig, a bit of his chin bitten off.

Moran and Wilbur kept to the quarterdeck, always within reach of the huge cutting-in spades, but the Chinese beach combers were too elated over their prize to pay them much attention.

And indeed the dead monster proved a veritable treasure-trove. By the end of the day he had been triced up to the foremast, and all hands straining at the windlass had raised the mighty head out of the water. The Chinamen descended upon the smooth, black body, their bare feet sliding and slipping at every step. They

BEACH COMBERS

held on by jabbing their knives into the hide as glacier-climbers do their ice-picks. The head yielded barrel after barrel of oil and a fair quantity of bone. The blubber was taken aboard the junk, minced up with hatchets, and run into casks.

Last of all, a Chinaman cut a hole through the "case," and, actually descending into the inside of the head, stripped away the spermaceti (clear as crystal), and packed it into buckets, which were hauled up on the junk's deck. The work occupied some two or three days. During this time the *Bertha Millner* was keeled over to nearly twenty degrees by the weight of the dead monster. However, neither Wilbur nor Moran made protest. The Chinamen would do as they pleased; that was said and signed. And they did not release the schooner until the whale had been emptied of oil and blubber, spermaceti and bone.

At length, on the afternoon of the third day, the captain of the junk, whose name was Hoang, presented himself upon the quarterdeck. He was naked to the waist, and his bare brown torso was gleaming with oil and sweat. His queue was coiled like a snake around his neck, his hatchet thrust into his belt.

"Well?" said Moran, coming up.

Wilbur caught his breath as the two stood there facing each other, so sharp was the contrast. The man, the Mongolian, small, wizened, leather-coloured, secretive—a strange, complex creature, steeped in all the obscure mystery of the East, nervous, ill at ease; and the girl, the Anglo-Saxon, daughter of the Northman, huge, blonde, big-boned, frank, outspoken, simple of composition, open as the day, bareheaded, her great ropes of sandy hair falling over her breast and almost to the top of her knee-boots. As he looked at the two, Wilbur asked himself where else but in California could such abrupt contrasts occur.

"All light," announced Hoang, "catch um all oil, catch um all bone, catch um all same plenty many. You help catch um, now you catch um pay. Sabe?"

The three principals came to a settlement with unprecedented directness. Like all Chinamen, Hoang was true to his promises, and had already set apart three and a half barrels of spermaceti, ten barrels of oil, and some twenty pounds of bone as the schooner's share in the transaction. There was no discussion over the matter. He called their attention to the discharge of his obligations, and hurried away to summon his men aboard and get the junk under way again.

The beach combers returned to their junk, and Wilbur and Moran set about cutting the carcass of the whale adrift. They found it would be easier to cut away the hide from around the hooks and loops of the tackle than to unfasten the tackle itself.

"The knots are jammed hard as steel," declared Moran. "Hand up that cutting-in spade; stand by with the other and cut loose at the same time as I do, so we can ease off the strain on these lines at the same time. Ready there, cut!" Moran set free the hook in the loop of black skin in a couple of strokes, but Wilbur was more clumsy; the skin resisted. He struck at it sharply with the heavy spade; the blade hit the iron hook, glanced off, and opened a large slit in the carcass below the head. A gush of entrails started from the slit, and Moran swore under breath.

"Ease away, quick there! You'll have the mast out of her next—steady! Hold your spade—what's that?"

Wilbur had nerved himself against the dreadful stench he expected would issue from the putrid monster, but he was surprised to note a pungent, sweet, and spicy odour that all at once made thick the air about him. It was an aromatic smell, stronger than that of the salt ocean, stronger even than the reek of oil and blubber

from the schooner's waist—sweet as incense, penetrating as attar, delicious as a summer breeze.

"It smells pretty good, whatever it is," he answered. Moran came up to where he stood, and looked at the slit he had made in the whale's carcass. Out of it was bulging some kind of dull white matter marbled with gray. It was a hard lump of irregular shape and about as big as a hogshead.

Moran glanced over to the junk, some forty feet distant. The beach combers were hoisting the lug-sail. Hoang was at the steering oar.

"Get that stuff aboard," she commanded quietly.

"That!" exclaimed Wilbur, pointing to the lump.

Moran's blue eyes were beginning to gleam.

"Yes, and do it before the Chinamen see you."

"But—but I don't understand."

Moran stepped to the quarterdeck, unslung the hammock in which Wilbur slept, and tossed it to him.

"Reeve it up in that; I'll pass you a line, and we'll haul it aboard. Godsend, those vermin yonder have got smells enough of their own without noticing this. Hurry, mate, I'll talk afterward."

Wilbur went over the side, and, standing as best he could upon the slippery carcass, dug out the lump and bound it up in the hammock.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Moran, with sudden exultation. "There's a lot of it. That's the biggest lump yet, I'll be bound. Is that all there is, mate?—look carefully." Her voice had dropped to a whisper.

"Yes, yes; that's all. Careful now when you haul up—Hoang has got his eye on you, and so have the rest of them. What do you call it, anyhow? Why are you so particular about it? Is it worth anything?"

"I don't know—perhaps. We'll have a look at it, anyway."

Moran hauled the stuff aboard, and Wilbur followed.

"Whew!" he exclaimed with half-closed eyes. "It's like the story of Samson and the dead lion—the sweet coming forth from the strong."

The schooner seemed to swim in a bath of perfumed air; the membrane of the nostrils fairly pringled with the sensation. Moran unleashed the hammock, and going down upon one knee examined the lump attentively.

"It didn't seem possible," Wilbur heard her saying to herself; "but there can't be any mistake. It's the stuff, right enough. I've heard of such things, but this—but this——" She rose to her feet, tossing back her hair.

"Well," said Wilbur, "what do you call it?"

"The thing to do now," returned Moran, "is to get clear of here as quietly and as quickly as we can, and take this stuff with us. I can't stop to explain now, but it's big—it's big. Mate, it's big as the Bank of England."

"Those beach combers are right on to the game, I'm afraid," said Wilbur. "Look, they're watching us. This stuff would smell across the ocean."

"Rot the beach combers! There's a bit of wind, thank God, and we can do four knots to their one, just let us get clear once."

Moran dragged the hammock back into the cabin, and returning upon deck, helped Wilbur to cut away the last tricing tackle. The schooner righted slowly to an even keel. Meanwhile the junk had set its one lug-sail and its crew had run out the sweeps. Hoang took the steering sweep and worked the junk to a position right across the *Bertha's* bows, some fifty feet ahead.

"They're watching us, right enough," said Wilbur.

"Up your mains'l," ordered Moran. The pair set the fore and main sails with great difficulty. Moran took the wheel and Wilbur went forward to cast off the line by which the schooner had been tied up to one of the whale's flukes.

"Cut it!" cried the girl. "Don't stop to cast off."

There was a hail from the beach combers; the port sweeps dipped and the junk bore up nearer.

"Hurry!" shouted Moran, "don't mind them. Are we clear for'rard—what's the trouble? Something's holding her." The schooner listed slowly to starboard and settled by the head.

"All clear!" cried Wilbur.

"There's something wrong!" exclaimed Moran; "she's settling for'rard." Hoang hailed the schooner a second time.

"We're still settling," called Wilbur from the bows, "what's the matter?"

"Matter that she's taking water," answered Moran wrathfully. "She's started something below, what with all that lifting and dancing and tricing up."

Wilbur ran back to the quarterdeck.

"This is a bad fix," he said to Moran. "Those chaps are coming aboard again. They're onto something, and, of course, at just this moment she begins to leak."

"They are after that ambergris," said Moran between her teeth. "Smelt it, of course—the swine!"

"Ambergris?"

"The stuff we found in the whale. That's ambergris."

"Well?"

"Well!" shouted Moran, exasperated. "Do you know that we have found a lump that will weigh close to 250 pounds, and do you know that ambergris is selling in San Francisco at \$40 an ounce? Do you know that we have picked up nearly \$150,000 right out here in the ocean and are in a fair way to lose it all?"

"Can't we run for it?"

"Run for it in a boat that's taking water like a sack! Our dory's gone. Suppose we got clear of the junk, and the *Bertha* sank? Then what? If we only had our crew aboard; if we were only ten to their dozen—if we were only six—by Jupiter! I'd fight them for it."

The two enormous red eyes of the junk loomed alongside and stared over into the *Bertha's* waist. Hoang and seven of the coolies swarmed aboard.

"What now?" shouted Moran, coming forward to meet them, her scowl knotting her flashing eyes together. "Is this ship yours or mine? We've done your dirty work for you. I want you clear of my deck." Wilbur stood at her side, uncertain what to do, but ready for anything she should attempt.

"I tink you catch um someting, smell um pretty big," said Hoang, his ferret glance twinkling about the schooner.

"I catch um nothing—nothing but plenty bad stink," said Moran. "No, you don't!" she exclaimed, putting herself in Hoang's way as he made for the cabin. The other beach combers came crowding up; Wilbur even thought he saw one of them loosening his hatchet in his belt.

"This ship's mine," cried Moran, backing to the cabin door. Wilbur followed her, and the Chinamen closed down upon the pair.

"It's not much use, Moran," he muttered. "They'll rush us in a minute."

"But the ambergris is mine—is mine," she answered, never taking her eyes from the confronting coolies.

"We find um w'ale," said Hoang; "you no find w'ale; him b'long to we—eve'yt'ing in um w'ale b'long to we, savvy?"

"No, you promised us a third of everything you found."

Even in the confusion of the moment it occurred to Wilbur that it was quite possible that at least two-thirds of the ambergris did belong to the beach combers by right of discovery. After all, it was the beach combers who had found the whale. He could never remember afterward whether or no he said as much to Moran at

the time. If he did, she had been deaf to it. A fury of wrath and desperation suddenly blazed in her blue eyes. Standing at her side, Wilbur could hear her teeth grinding upon each other. She was blind to all danger, animated only by a sense of injustice and imposition.

Hoang uttered a sentence in Cantonese. One of the coolies jumped forward, and Moran's fist met him in the face and brought him to his knees. Then came the rush Wilbur had foreseen. He had just time to catch a sight of Moran at grapples with Hoang when a little hatchet glinted over his head. He struck out savagely into the thick of the group—and then opened his eyes to find Moran washing the blood from his hair as he lay on the deck with his head in the hollow of her arm. Everything was quiet. The beach combers were gone.

"Hello, what—what—what is it?" he asked, springing to his feet, his head swimming and smarting. "We had a row, didn't we? Did they hurt you? Oh, I remember; I got a cut over the head—one of their hatchet men. Did they hurt you?"

"They got the loot," she growled. "Filthy vermin! And just to make everything pleasant, the schooner's sinking."

CHAPTER VIII

A RUN FOR LAND

SINKING!" exclaimed Wilbur.

Moran was already on her feet. "We'll have to beach her," she cried, "and we're six miles out. Up y'r jib, mate!" The two set the jib, flying-jib, and staysails.

The fore and main sails were already drawing and under all the spread of her canvas the *Bertha* raced back toward the shore.

But by the time she was within the head of the bay her stern had settled to such an extent that the forefoot was clear of the water, the bowsprit pointing high into the heavens. Moran was at the wheel, her scowl thicker than ever, her eyes measuring the stretch of water that lay between the schooner and the shore.

"She'll never make it in God's world," she muttered as she listened to the wash of the water in the cabin under her feet. In the hold, empty barrels were afloat, knocking hollowly against each other. "We're in a bad way, mate."

"If it comes to that," returned Wilbur, surprised to see her thus easily downcast, who was usually so indomitable, "if it comes to that, we can swim for it—a couple of planks——"

"Swim?" she echoed; "I'm not thinking of that. of course we could swim."

"What, then?"

"The sharks!"

Wilbur's teeth clicked sharply together. He could think of nothing to say.

As the water gained between decks the schooner's speed dwindled, and at the same time as she approached the shore the wind, shut off by the land, fell away. By this time the ocean was not four inches below the stern-rail. Two miles away was the nearest sand-spit. Wilbur broke out a distress signal on the foremast, in the hope that Charlie and the deserters might send off the dory to their assistance. But the deserters were nowhere in sight.

"What became of the junk?" he demanded suddenly of Moran. She motioned to the westward with her head. "Still laying outside."

Twenty minutes passed. Once only Moran spoke.

"When she begins to go," she said, "she'll go with a rush. Jump pretty wide, or you'll get caught in the suction."

The two had given up all hope. Moran held grimly to the wheel as a mere matter of form. Wilbur stood at her side, his clenched fists thrust into his pockets. The eyes of both were fixed on the yellow line of the distant beach. By and by Moran turned to him with an odd smile.

"We're a strange pair to die together," she said. Wilbur met her eyes an instant, but finding no reply, put his chin in the air as though he would have told her she might well say that.

"A strange pair to die together," Moran repeated; "but we can do that better than we could have"—she looked away from him—"could have *lived* together," she finished, and smiled again.

"And yet," said Wilbur, "these last few weeks here on board the schooner, we have been through a good deal—together. I don't know," he went on clumsily, "I don't know when I've been—when I've had—I've been happier than these last weeks. It *is* queer, isn't it? I know, of course, what you'll say. I've said it to

myself often of late. *I* belong to the city and to my life there, and you—you belong to the ocean. I never knew a girl like you—never knew a girl *could* be like you. You don't know how extraordinary it all seems to me. You swear like a man, and you dress like a man, and I don't suppose you've ever been associated with other women; and you're strong—I know you are as strong as I am. You have no idea how different you are to the kind of girl I've known. Imagine my kind of girl standing up before Hoang and those cutthroat beach combers with their knives and hatchets. Maybe it's because you are so unlike my kind of girl that—that things are as they are with me. *I* don't know. It's a queer situation. A month or so ago I was at a tea in San Francisco, and now I'm aboard a shark-fishing schooner sinking in Magdalena Bay; and I'm with a girl that—that—that I—well, I'm with *you*, and, well, *you* know how it is—I might as well say it—I love you more than I imagined I ever could love a girl."

Moran's frown came back to her forehead.

"I don't like that kind of talk," she said; "I am not used to it, and I don't know how to take it. Believe me," she said with a half laugh, "it's all wasted. *I* never could love a man. I'm not made for men."

"No," said Wilbur, "nor for other women either."

"Nor for other women either."

Wilbur fell silent. In that instant he had a distinct vision of Moran's life and character, shunning men and shunned of women, a strange, lonely creature, solitary as the ocean whereon she lived, beautiful after her fashion; as yet without sex, proud, untamed, splendid in her savage, primal independence—a thing untouched and unsullied by civilization. She seemed to him some Bradamante, some mythical Brunhilde, some Valkyrie of the legends born out of season, lost and unfamiliar in this end-of-the-century time. Her purity was the

purity of primeval glaciers. He could easily see how to such a girl the love of a man would appear only in the light of a humiliation—a degradation. And yet she *could* love, else how had *he* been able to love her? Wilbur found himself—even at that moment—wondering how the thing could be done—wondering to just what note the untouched cords would vibrate. Just how she should be awakened one morning to find that she—Moran, sea-rover, virgin unconquered, without law, without land, without sex—was, after all, a woman.

“By God, mate!” she exclaimed of a sudden. “The barrels are keeping us up—the empty barrels in the hold. Hoh! we’ll make land yet.”

It was true. The empty hogsheads, destined for the storage of oil, had been forced up by the influx of the water to the roof of the hold, and were acting as so many buoys—the schooner could sink no lower. An hour later, the quarterdeck all awash, her bow thrown high into the air, listing horribly to starboard, the *Bertha Millner* took ground on the shore of Magdalena Bay at about the turn of the tide.

Moran swung herself over the side, hip deep in water, and, wading ashore with a line, made fast to the huge skull of a whale half buried in the sand at that point.

Wilbur followed. The schooner had grounded upon the southern horn of the bay and lay easily on a spit of sand. They could not examine the nature of the leak until low water the next morning.

“Well, here we are,” said Moran, her thumbs in her belt. “What next? We may be here for two days, we *may* be here for two years. It all depends upon how bad a hole she has. Have we ‘put in for repairs,’ or have we been cast away, can’t tell till to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I’m hungry.”

Half of the stores of the schooner were water-soaked, but upon examination Wilbur found that *enough* re-

mained intact to put them beyond all fear for the present.

"There's plenty of water up the creek," he said, "and we can snare all the quail we want; and then there's the fish and abalone. Even if the stores were gone we could make out very well."

The schooner's cabin was full of water and Wilbur's hammock was gone, so the pair decided to camp on shore. In that torrid weather, to sleep in the open air was a luxury.

In great good spirits the two sat down to their first meal on land. Moran cooked a supper that, barring the absence of coffee, was delicious. The whiskey was had from aboard, and they pledged each other, standing up, in something over two stiff fingers.

"Moran," said Wilbur, "you ought to have been born a man."

"At all events, mate," she said, "at all events, I'm not a girl."

"No!" exclaimed Wilbur, as he filled his pipe. "No, you're just Moran, Moran of the *Lady Letty*."

"And I'll stay that, too," she said decisively.

Never had an evening been more beautiful in Wilbur's eyes. There was not a breath of air. The stillness was so profound that the faint murmur of the blood behind the ear-drums became an oppression. The ocean tiptoed toward the land with tiny rustling steps. The west was one gigantic stained window, the ocean floor a solid shimmer of opalescence. Behind them, sullen purples marked the horizon, hooded with mountain crests, and after a long while the moon shrugged a gleaming shoulder into view.

Wilbur, dressed in Chinese jeans and blouse, with Chinese wicker sandals on his bare feet, sat with his back against the whale's skull, smoking quietly. For a long time there was no conversation; then at last:

"No," said Moran in a low voice. "This is the life I'm made for. In six years I've not spent three consecutive weeks on land. Now that Eilert" (she always spoke of her father by his first name), "now that Eilert is dead, I've not a tie, not a relative, not even a friend, and I don't wish it."

"But the loneliness of the life, the solitude," said Wilbur, "that's what I don't understand. Did it ever occur to you that the best happiness is the happiness that one shares?"

Moran clasped a knee in both hands and looked out to sea. She never wore a hat, and the red light of the afterglow was turning her rye-hued hair to saffron.

"Hoh!" she exclaimed, her heavy voice pitched even lower than usual. "Who could understand or share any of my pleasures, or be happy when I'm happy? And, besides, I'm happiest when I'm alone—I don't want anyone."

"But," hesitated Wilbur, "one is not always alone. After all, you *are* a girl, and men, sailor-men especially, are beasts when it's a question of a woman—an unprotected woman."

"I'm stronger than most men," said Moran simply. "If you, for instance, had been like some men, I should have fought you. It wouldn't have been the first time," she added, smoothing one huge braid between her palms.

Wilbur looked at her with intent curiosity—noted again, as if for the first time, the rough blue overalls thrust into the shoes; the coarse flannel shirt open at the throat; the belt with its sheath-knife; her arms big and white and tattooed in sailor fashion; her thick, muscular neck; her red face, with its pale blue eyes and almost massive jaw; and her hair, her heavy, yellow, fragrant hair, that lay over her shoulder and breast, coiling and looping in her lap.

"No," he said, with a long breath, "I don't make it out. I knew you were out of my experience, but I begin to think now that you are out of even my imagination. You are right, you *should* keep to yourself. You should be alone—your mate isn't made yet. You are splendid just as you are," while under his breath he added, his teeth clenching, "and God! but I love you."

It was growing late, the stars were all out, the moon riding high. Moran yawned:

"Mate, I think I'll turn in. We'll have to be at that schooner early in the morning, and I make no doubt she'll give us plenty to do." Wilbur hesitated to reply, waiting to take his cue from what next she should say. "It's hot enough to sleep where we are," she added, "without going aboard the *Bertha*, though we might have a couple of blankets off to lie on. This sand's as hard as a plank."

Without answering, Wilbur showed her a couple of blanket-rolls he had brought off while he was unloading part of the stores that afternoon. They took one apiece and spread them on the sand by the bleached whale's skull. Moran pulled off her boots and stretched herself upon her blanket with absolute unconcern, her hands clasped under her head. Wilbur rolled up his coat for a pillow and settled himself for the night with an assumed self-possession. There was a long silence. Moran yawned again.

"I pulled the heel off my boot this morning," she said lazily, "and I've been limping all day."

"I noticed it," answered Wilbur. "Kitchell had a new pair aboard somewhere, if they're not spoiled by the water now."

"Yes?" she said indifferently; "we'll look them up in the morning."

Again there was silence.

"I wonder," she began again, staring up into the

dark, "if Charlie took that frying-pan off with him when he went?"

"I don't know. He probably did."

"It was the only thing we had to cook abalones in. Make me think to look into the galley to-morrow. . . . This ground's as hard as nails, for all your blankets. . . . Well, good-night, mate; I'm going to sleep."

"Good-night, Moran."

Three hours later Wilbur, who had not closed his eyes, sat up and looked at Moran, sleeping quietly, her head in a pale glory of hair; looked at her, and then around him at the silent, deserted land.

"I don't know," he said to himself. "Am I a right-minded man and a thoroughbred, or a mush-head, or merely a prudent, sensible sort of chap that values his skin and bones? I'd be glad to put a name to myself." Then, more earnestly he added: "Do I love her too much, or not enough, or love her the wrong way, or how?" He leaned toward her, so close that he could catch the savour of her breath and the smell of her neck, warm with sleep. The sleeve of the coarse blue shirt was drawn up, and it seemed to him as if her bare arm, flung out at full length, had some sweet aroma of its own. Wilbur drew softly back.

"No," he said to himself decisively; "no, I guess I *am* a thoroughbred, after all." It was only then that he went to sleep.

When he awoke the sea was pink with the sunrise, and one of the bay heads was all distorted and stratified by a mirage. It was hot already. Moran was sitting a few paces from him, braiding her hair.

"Hello, Moran!" he said, rousing up; "how long have you been up?"

"Since before sunrise," she said; "I've had a bath in the cove where the creek runs down. I saw a jack-rabbit."

"Seen anything of Charlie and the others?"

"They've camped on the other side of the bay. But look yonder," she added.

The junk had come in over night, and was about a mile and a half from shore.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Wilbur. "What are they after?"

"Fresh water, I guess," said Moran, knotting the end of a braid. "We'd better have breakfast in a hurry, and turn to on the *Bertha*. The tide is going out fast."

While they breakfasted they kept an eye on the schooner, watching her sides and flanks as the water fell slowly away.

"Don't see anything very bad yet," said Wilbur.

"It's somewheres in her stern," remarked Moran.

In an hour's time the *Bertha Millner* was high and dry, and they could examine her at their leisure. It was Moran who found the leak.

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, with a half-laugh, "we can stick that up in half an hour."

A single plank had started away from the stern-post; that was all. Otherwise the schooner was as sound as the day she left San Francisco. Moran and Wilbur had the damage repaired by noon, nailing the plank into its place and caulking the seams with lamp-wick. Nor could their most careful search discover any further injury.

"We're ready to go," said Moran, "so soon as she'll float. We can dig away around the bow here, make fast a line to that rock out yonder, and warp her off at next tide. Hello! who's this?"

It was Charlie. While the two had been at work, he had come around the shore unobserved, and now stood at some little distance, smiling at them calmly.

"Well, what do you want?" cried Moran angrily.

"If you had your rights, my friend, you'd be keel-hauled."

"I tink um velly hot day."

"You didn't come here to say that. What do you want?"

"I come hab talkee-talk."

"We don't want to have any talkee-talk with such vermin as you. Get out!"

Charlie sat down on the beach and wiped his forehead.

"I come buy one-piecee bacon. China boy no hab got."

"We aren't selling bacon to deserters," cried Moran; "and I'll tell you this, you filthy little monkey: Mr. Wilbur and I are going home—back to Frisco—this afternoon; and we're going to leave you and the rest of your vipers to rot on this beach, or to be murdered by beach combers," and she pointed out toward the junk. Charlie did not even follow the direction of her gesture, and from this very indifference Wilbur guessed that it was precisely because of the beach combers that the Machiavellian Chinaman had wished to treat with his old officers.

"No hab got bacon?" he queried, lifting his eyebrows in surprise.

"Plenty; but not for you."

Charlie took a buckskin bag from his blouse and counted out a handful of silver and gold.

"I buy um nisi two-piecee tobacco."

"Look here," said Wilbur deliberately; "don't you try to flim-flam us, Charlie. We know you too well. You don't want bacon and you don't want tobacco."

"China boy heap plenty much sick. Two boy velly sick. I tink um die pletty soon to-molla. You catch um slop-chest; you gib me five, seven livel pill. Sabe?"

"I'll tell you what you want," cried Moran, aiming a

forefinger at him, pistol fashion; "you've got a blue funk because those Kai-gingh beach combers have come into the bay, and you're more frightened of them than you are of the schooner; and now you want us to take you home."

"How muchee?"

"A thousand dollars."

Wilbur looked at her in surprise. He had expected a refusal.

"You no hab got livel pill?" inquired Charlie blandly.

Moran turned her back on him. She and Wilbur conferred in a low voice.

"We'd better take them back, if we decently can," said Moran. "The schooner is known, of course, in Frisco. She went out with Kitchell and a crew of coolies, and she comes back with you and I aboard, and if we tell the truth about it, it will sound like a lie, and we'll have no end of trouble. Then again, can just you and I work the *Bertha* into port? In these kind of airs it's plain work, but suppose we have dirty weather? I'm not so sure."

"I gib you ten dollah fo' ten livel pill," said Charlie.

"Will you give us a thousand dollars to set you down in San Francisco?"

Charlie rose. "I go back. I tell um China boy what you say 'bout livel pill. Bime-by I come back."

"That means he'll take our offer back to his friends," said Wilbur, in a low voice. "You best hurry chop-chop," he called after Charlie; "we go home pretty soon!"

"He knows very well we can't get away before high tide to-morrow," said Moran. "He'll take his time."

Later on in the afternoon Moran and Wilbur saw a small boat put off from the junk and make a landing by the creek. The beach combers were taking on water. The boat made three trips before evening, but the

beach combers made no show of molesting the undefended schooner, or in any way interfering with Charlie's camp on the other side of the bay.

"No!" exclaimed Moran between her teeth, as she and Wilbur were cooking supper; "no, they don't need to; they've got about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars of loot on board—*our* loot, too! Good God! it goes against the grain!"

The moon rose considerably earlier that night, and by twelve o'clock the bay was flooded with its electrical whiteness. Wilbur and Moran could plainly make out the junk tied up to the kelp off-shore. But toward one o'clock Wilbur was awakened by Moran shaking his arm.

"There's something wrong out there," she whispered; "something wrong with the junk. Hear 'em squealing? Look! look! look!" she cried of a sudden; "it's their turn now!"

Wilbur could see the crank junk, with its staring red eyes, high stern and prow, as distinctly as though at noonday. As he watched, it seemed as if a great wave caught her suddenly under foot. She heaved up bodily out of the water, dropped again with a splash, rose again, and again fell back into her own ripples, that, widening from her sides, broke crisply on the sand at Wilbur's feet.

Then the commotion ceased abruptly. The bay was quiet again. An hour passed, then two. The moon began to set. Moran and Wilbur, wearied of watching, had turned in again, when they were startled to wakefulness by the creak of oarlocks and the sound of a boat grounding the sand.

The coolies—the deserters from *Bertha Millner*—were there. Charlie came forward.

"Ge'lup! Ge'lup!" he said. "Junk all smash! Kai-gingh come ashore. I tink him want catch um schooner."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAPTURE OF HOANG

WHAT smashed the junk? What wrecked her?" demanded Moran.

The deserting Chinamen huddled around Charlie, drawing close, as if finding comfort in the feel of each other's elbows.

"No can tell," answered Charlie. "Him shake, then lif' up all the same as we. Bime-by too much lif' up; him smash all to—— Four-piecee Chinamen ddown."

"Drown! Did any of them drown?" exclaimed Moran.

"Four-piecee ddown," reiterated Charlie, calmly. "One, thlee, five, nine, come asho'. Him othah no come."

"Where are the ones that came ashore?" asked Wilbur.

Charlie waved a hand back into the night. "Him make um camp topside ole house."

"That old whaling-camp," prompted Moran. Then to Wilbur: "You remember—about a hundred yards north the creek?"

Wilbur, Moran, and Charlie had drawn off a little from the *Bertha Millner's* crew. The latter squatted in a line along the shore—silent, reserved, looking vaguely seaward through the night. Moran spoke again, her scowl thickening.

"Him catch um schooner sure! Him want um boat to go home. No can get."

"Let's put off to-night—right away," said Wilbur.

"Low tide," answered Moran; "and besides—

Charlie, did you see them close? Were you near them?"

"No go muchee close."

"Did they have something with them, reeved up in a hammock—something that smelled sweet?"

"Like a joss-stick, for instance?"

"No savvy; no can tell. Him try catch um schooner sure. Him velly bad China boy. See Yup China boy, velly bad. I b'long Sam Yup. Savvy?"

"Ah! the tongs?"

"Yas. I Sam Yup. Him," and he pointed to the *Bertha's* crew, "Sam Yup. All we Sam Yup; nisi him," and he waved a hand toward the beach-combers' camp; "him See Yup. Savvy?"

"It's a tong row," said Wilbur. "They're blood enemies, the See Yups and Sam Yups."

Moran fell thoughtful, digging her boot-heel into the sand, her thumbs hooked into her belt, her forehead gathered into a heavy frown. There was a silence.

"One thing," she said, at last; "we can't give up the schooner. They would take our stores as well, and then where are we? Marooned, by Jove! How far do you suppose we are from the nearest town? Three hundred miles wouldn't be a bad guess, and they've got the loot—our ambergris—I'll swear to that. They didn't leave that aboard when the junk sank."

"Look here, Charlie," she said, turning to the Chinaman. "If the beach combers take the schooner—the *Bertha Millner*—from us, we'll be left to starve on this beach."

"I tink um yas."

"How are we going to get home? Are you going to let them do it? Are you going to let them have our schooner?"

"I tink no can have."

"Look here," she went on, with sudden energy. "There are only nine of them now, to our eight. We're

about even. We can fight those swine. I know we can. If we jumped their camp and rushed them hard, believe me, we could run them into the sea. Mate," she cried. suddenly facing Wilbur, "are you game? Have you got blood in you? Those beach combers are going to attack us to-morrow, before high tide—that's flat. There's going to be a fight anyway. We can't let them have the schooner. It's starvation for us if we do.

"They mean to make a dash for the *Bertha*, and we've got to fight them off. If there's any attacking to be done I propose to do it! I propose we jump their camp before it gets light—now—to-night—right away—run in on them there, take them by surprise, do for one or two of them if we have to, and get that ambergris. Then cut back to the schooner, up our sails, and wait for the tide to float us off. We can do it—I know we can. Mate, will you back me up?"

"Back you up? You bet I'll back you up, Moran. But——" Wilbur hesitated. "We could fight them so much more to advantage from the deck of the schooner. Why not wait for them aboard? We could have our sails up, anyhow, and we could keep the beach combers off till the tide rose high enough to drive them back. Why not do that?"

"I tink bes' wait topside boat," assented Charlie.

"Yes; why not, Moran?"

"Because," shouted the girl, "they've got our loot. I don't propose to be plundered of \$150,000 if I can help it."

"Wassa dat?" demanded Charlie. "Hunder fifteen tλουςand you hab got?"

"I did have it—we had it, the mate and I. We triced a sperm-whale for the beach combers, and when they thought they had everything out of him we found a lump of ambergris in him that will weigh close to two hundred pounds. Now look here, Charlie. The beach

THE CAPTURE OF HOANG

combers have got the stuff. It's mine—I'm going to have it back. Here's the lay. Your men can fight—you can fight yourself. We'll make it a business proposition. Help me to get that ambergris, and if we get it I'll give each one of the men \$1,000, and I'll give you \$1,500. You can take that up and be independent rich the rest of your life. You can chuck it and rot on this beach, for it's fight or lose the schooner; you know that as well as I do. If you've got to fight anyhow, why not fight where it's going to pay the most?"

Charlie hesitated, pursing his lips.

"How about this, Moran?" Wilbur broke forth now, unheard by Charlie. "I've just been thinking; have we got a right to this ambergris, after all? The beach combers found the whale. It was theirs. How have we the right to take the ambergris away from them any more than the sperm and the oil and the bone? It's theirs, if you come to that. I don't know as we've the right to it."

"Darn you!" shouted Moran in a blaze of fury, "right to it, right to it! If I haven't who has? Who found it? Those dirty monkeys might have stood some show to a claim if they'd held to the one-third bargain, and offered to divvy with us when they got me where I couldn't help myself. I don't say I'd give in now if they had—give in to let 'em walk off with a hundred thousand dollars that I've got as good a claim to as they have. But they've saved me the trouble of arguing the question. They've taken it all, all! and there's no bargain in the game at all now. Now the stuff belongs to the strongest of us, and I'm glad of it. They thought they were the strongest and now they're going to find out. We're dumped down here on this God-forsaken sand, and there's no law and no policemen. The strongest of us are going to live and the weakest are going to die. I'm going to live and I'm going to have my loot, too,

and I'm not going to split fine hairs with these robbers at this time of day. I'm going to have it all, and that's the law you're under in this case, my righteous friend!"

She turned her back upon him, spinning around upon her heel, and Wilbur felt ashamed of himself and proud of her.

"I go talkee-talk to China boy," said Charlie, coming up.

For about five minutes the Chinamen conferred together, squatting in a circle on the beach. Moran paced up and down by the stranded dory. Wilbur leaned against the bleached whale skull, his hands in his pockets. Once he looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock.

"All light," said Charlie, coming out from the group at last; "him fight plenty."

"Now," exclaimed Moran, "we've no time to waste. What arms have we got?"

"We've the cutting-in spades," said Wilbur; "there's five of them. They're nearly ten feet long and the blades are as sharp as razors; you couldn't want better pikes."

"That's an idea," returned Moran, evidently willing to forget her outburst of a moment before, perhaps already sorry for it. The party took stock of their weapons, and five huge cutting-in spades, a heavy knife from the galley, and a revolver of doubtful effectiveness were divided among them. The crew took the spades, Charlie the knife, and Wilbur the revolver. Moran had her own knife, a haftless dirk, such as is affected by all Norwegians, whether landsmen or sailors. They were examining this armament and Moran was suggesting a plan of attack, when Hoang, the leader of the beach combers, and one other Chinaman, appeared some little distance below them on the beach. The moon was low and there was no great light, but the two beach combers caught the flash of the points of the spades. They halted

and glanced narrowly and suspiciously at the group.

"Beasts!" muttered Moran. "They are up to the game—there's no surprising them now. Talk to him, Charlie; see what he wants."

Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie came part of the way toward Hoang and his fellow, and paused some fifteen feet distant, and a long colloquy ensued. It soon became evident, however, that in reality Hoang wanted nothing of them, though with great earnestness he asserted his willingness to charter the *Bertha Millner* back to San Francisco.

"That's not his game at all," said Moran to Wilbur, in a low tone, her eyes never leaving those of the beach comber. "He's pretty sure he could seize the *Bertha* and never pay us a stiver. They've come down to spy on us, and they're doing it, too. There's no good trying to rush their camp now. They'll go back and tell the crew that we know their lay."

It was still very dark. Near the hulk of the beached *Bertha Millner* were grouped her crew, each armed with a long and lance-like cutting-in spade, watching and listening to the conference of the chiefs. The moon, almost down, had flushed blood-red, violently streaking the gray, smooth surface of the bay with her reflection. The tide was far out, rippling quietly along the reaches of wet sand. In the pauses of the conference the vast, muffling silence shut down with the abruptness of a valve suddenly closed.

How it happened, just who made the first move, in precisely what manner the action had been planned, or what led up to it, Wilbur could not afterward satisfactorily explain. There was a rush forward—he remembered that much—a dull thudding of feet over the resounding beach surface, a moment's writhing struggle with a half-naked brown figure that used knife and nail and tooth, and then the muffling silence again, broken

only by the sound of their own panting. In that whirl of swift action Wilbur could reconstruct but two brief pictures: the Chinaman, Hoang's companion, flying like one possessed along the shore; Hoang himself flung headlong into the arms of the *Bertha's* coolies, and Moran, her eyes blazing, her thick braids flying, brandishing her fist as she shouted at the top of her deep voice, "We've got you, anyhow!"

They had taken Hoang prisoner, whether by treachery or not Wilbur did not exactly know; and, even if unfair means had been used, he could not repress a feeling of delight and satisfaction, as he told himself that in the very beginning of the fight that was to follow he and his mates had gained the first advantage.

As the action of that night's events became more and more accelerated, Wilbur could not but notice the change in Moran. It was very evident that the old Norse fighting-blood of her was all astir; brutal, merciless, savage beyond all control. A sort of obsession seized upon her at the near approach of battle, a frenzy of action that was checked by nothing—that was insensible to all restraint. At times it was impossible for him to make her hear him, or when she heard to understand what he was saying. Her vision contracted. It was evident that she could not see distinctly. Wilbur could no longer conceive of her as a woman of the days of civilization. She was lapsing back to the eighth century again—to the Vikings, the sea-wolves, the berserkers.

"Now you're going to talk," she cried to Hoang, as the bound Chinaman sat upon the beach, leaning his back against the great skull. "Charlie, ask him if they saved the ambergris when the junk went down—if they've got it now?" Charlie put the question in Chinese but the beach comber only twinkled his vicious eyes upon them and held his peace. With the full sweep of her

arm, her fist clenched till the knuckles whitened, Moran struck him in the face.

"Now will you talk?" she cried. Hoang wiped the blood from his face upon his shoulder and set his jaws. He did not answer.

"You will talk before I'm done with you, my friend; don't get any wrong notions in your head about that," Moran continued, her teeth clenched. "Charlie," she added, "is there a file aboard the schooner?"

"I tink um yas, boss hab got file."

"In the tool-chest, isn't it?" Charlie nodded, and Moran ordered it to be fetched.

"If we're to fight that crowd," she said, speaking to herself and in a rapid voice, thick from excitement and passion, "we've got to know where they've hid the loot, and what weapons they've got. If they have a rifle or a shotgun with them, it's going to make a big difference for us. The other fellow escaped and has gone back to warn the rest. It's fight now, and no mistake."

The Chinaman who had been sent aboard the schooner returned, carrying a long, rather coarse-grained file. Moran took it from him.

"Now," she said, standing in front of Hoang, "I'll give you one more chance. Answer me. Did you bring off the ambergris, you beast, when your junk sank? Where is it now? How many men have you? What arms have you got? Have your men got a rifle? Charlie, put that all to him in your lingo, so as to make sure that he understands. Tell him if he don't talk I'm going to make him very sick."

Charlie put the questions in Chinese, pausing after each one. Hoang held his peace.

"I gave you fair warning," shouted Moran angrily, pointing at him with the file. "Will you answer?"

"Him no tell nuttin," observed Charlie.

"Fetch a cord here," commanded Moran. The cord

was brought, and despite Hoang's struggles and writhings the file was thrust endways into his mouth and his jaws bound tightly together upon it by means of the cord passed over his head and under his chin. Some four inches of the file protruded from his lips. Moran took this end and drew it out between the beach comber's teeth, then pushed it back slowly.

The hideous rasp of the operation turned Wilbur's blood cold within him. He looked away—out to sea, down the beach—anywhere, so that he might not see what was going forward. But the persistent grind and scrape still assaulted his ears. He turned about sharply.

"I—I—I'll go down the beach here a ways," he said quickly. "I can't stand—I'll keep watch to see if the beach combers come up."

A few minutes later he heard Charlie hailing him.

"Chin-chin heap plenty now," said he, with a grin, as Wilbur came up.

Hoang sat on the sand in the midst of the circle. The file and coil of rope lay on the ground near by. The beach comber was talking in a high-keyed sing-song, but with a lisp. He told them partly in pigeon-English and partly in Cantonese, which Charlie translated, that their men were eight in number, and that they had intended to seize the schooner that night, but that probably his own capture had delayed their plans. They had no rifle. A shotgun had been on board, but had gone down with the sinking of the junk. The ambergris had been cut into two lumps, and would be found in a couple of old flour-sacks in the stern of the boat in which he and his men had come ashore. They were all armed with their little hatchets. He thought two of the men carried knives as well. There was neither pistol nor revolver among them.

"It seems to me," said Wilbur, "that we've got the long end."

"We catch um boss, too!" said Charlie, pointing to Hoang.

"And we are better armed," assented Moran. "We've got the cutting-in spades."

"And the revolver, if it will shoot any farther than it will kick."

"They'll give us all the fight we want," declared Moran.

"Oh, him Kai-gingh, him fight all same devil."

"Give the men brandy, Charlie," commanded Moran. "We'll rush that camp right away."

The demijohn of spirits was brought down from the *Bertha* and passed around, Wilbur and Moran drinking from the tin cup, the coolies from the bottle. Hoang was fettered and locked in the *Bertha's* cabin.

"Now, then, are we ready?" cried Moran.

"I tink all right," answered Charlie.

The party set off down the beach. The moon had long since gone down, and the dawn was whitening over the eastern horizon. Landward, ragged blankets of morning mist lay close in the hollows here and there. It was profoundly still. The stars were still out. The surface of Magdalena Bay was smooth as a sheet of gray silk.

Twenty minutes passed, half an hour, an hour. The party tramped steadily forward, Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie leading, the coolies close behind carrying the cutting-in spades over their shoulders. Slowly and in silence they made the half circuit of the bay. The *Bertha Millner* was far behind them by now, a vague gray mass in the early morning light.

"Did you ever fight before?" Moran suddenly demanded of Charlie.

"One time I fight plenty much in San Flancisco in Washington Stleet. Fight um See Yups."

Another half-hour passed. At times when they halted they began to hear the faint murmur of the creek, just

beyond which was the broken and crumbling shanty, relic of an old Portuguese whaling-camp, where the beach-combers were camped. At Charlie's suggestion the party made a circuit, describing a half moon, to landward, so as to come out upon the enemy sheltered by the sand-dunes. Twenty minutes later they crossed the creek about four hundred yards from the shore. Here they spread out into a long line, and, keeping an interval of about fifteen feet between each of them, moved cautiously forward. The unevenness of the sand-breaks hid the shore from view, but Moran, Wilbur, and Charlie knew that by keeping the creek upon their left they would come out directly upon the house.

A few moments later Charlie held up his hand, and the men halted. The noise of the creek chattering into the tidewater of the bay was plainly audible just beyond; a ridge of sand, covered thinly with sage-brush, and a faint column of smoke rose into the air over the ridge itself. They were close in. The coolies were halted, and, dropping upon their hands and knees, the three leaders crawled to the top of the break. Sheltered by a couple of sage-bushes and lying flat to the ground, Wilbur looked over and down upon the beach. The first object he made out was a crazy, roofless house, built of driftwood, the chinks plastered with 'dobe mud, the door fallen in.

Beyond, on the beach, was a flat-bottomed dinghy, unpainted and foul with dirt. But all around the house the sand had been scooped and piled to form a low barricade, and behind this barricade Wilbur saw the beach combers. There were eight of them. They were alert and ready, their hatchets in their hands. The gaze of each of them was fixed directly upon the sand-break which sheltered the *Bertha Millner's* officers and crew. They seemed to Wilbur to look him straight in the eye. They neither moved nor spoke. The silence and abso-

lute lack of motion on the part of these small, half-naked Chinamen, with their ape-like muzzles and twinkling eyes, was ominous.

There could be no longer any doubt that the beach combers had known of their enemies' movements and were perfectly aware of their presence behind the sand-break. Moran rose to her feet, and Wilbur and Charlie followed her example.

"There's no use hiding," she said; "they know we're here."

Charlie called up the crew. The two parties were ranged face to face. Over the eastern rim of the Pacific the blue whiteness of the early dawn was turning to a dull, roseate gold at the core of the sunrise. The headlands of Magdalena Bay stood black against the pale glow; overhead, the greater stars still shone. The monotonous, faint ripple of the creek was the only sound. It was about 3:30 o'clock.

CHAPTER X

A BATTLE

WILBUR had imagined that the fight would be hardly more than a wild rush down the slope of the beach, a dash over the beach combers' breastworks of sand, and a brief hand-to-hand scrimmage around the old cabin. In all accounts he had ever read of such affairs, and in all ideas he had entertained on the subject, this had always been the case. The two bodies had shocked together like a college rush, there had been five minutes' play of knife and club and gun, a confused whirl of dust and smoke, and all was over before one had time either to think or be afraid. But nothing of the kind happened that morning.

The *Bertha Millner's* crew, in a long line, Moran at one end, Wilbur at the other, and Charlie in the centre, came on toward the beach combers, step by step. There was little outcry. Each contestant singled out his enemy, and made slowly for him with eyes fixed and weapon ready, regardless of the movements of his mates.

"See any rifles among them, Charlie?" shouted Moran, suddenly breaking the silence.

"No, I tink no hab got," answered Charlie.

Wilbur took another step forward and cocked his revolver. One of the beach combers shouted out something in angry vernacular, and Charlie instantly responded. All this time the line had been slowly advancing upon the enemy, and Wilbur began to wonder how long that heartbreaking suspense was to continue.

This was not at all what he had imagined. Already he was within twenty feet of his man, could see the evil glint of his slant, small eye, and the shine of his yellow body, naked to the belt. Still foot by foot the forward movement continued. The Chinese on either side had begun exchanging insults; the still, hot air of the tropic dawn was vibrant with the Cantonese monosyllables tossed back and forth like tennis-balls over the low sand rampart. The thing was degenerating into a farce—the *Bertha's* Chinamen would not fight.

Back there, under the shelter of the schooner, it was all very well to talk, and they had been very brave when they had all flung themselves upon Hoang. Here, face to face with the enemy, the sun striking off heliograph flashes from their knives and spades, it was a vastly different matter. The thing, to Wilbur's mind, should have been done suddenly if it was to be done at all. The best course now was to return to camp and try some other plan. Charlie shouted a direction to him in pigeon-English that he did not understand, but he answered all right, and moved forward another step so as to be in line with the coolie at his left.

The liquor that he had drunk before starting began suddenly to affect him, yet he knew that his head was yet clear. He could not bring himself to run away before them all, but he would have given much to have discovered a good reason for postponing the fight—if fight there was to be.

He remembered the cocked revolver in his hand, and, suddenly raising it, fired point-blank at his man, not fifteen feet away. The hammer snapped on the nipple, but the cartridge did not explode. Wilbur turned to the Chinaman next him in line, exclaiming excitedly:

"Here, say, have you got a knife—something I can fight with? This gun's no good."

There was a shout from Moran:

"Look out, here they come!"

Two of the beach combers suddenly sprang over the sand breastworks and ran toward Charlie, their knives held low in front of them, ready to rip.

"Shoot! shoot! shoot!" shouted Moran rapidly.

Wilbur's revolver was a self-cocker. He raised it again, drawing hard on the trigger as he did so. It roared and leaped in his hand, and a whiff of burnt powder came to his nostrils. Then Wilbur was astonished to hear himself shout at the top of his voice:

"Come on now, get into them—get into them now, everybody!"

The *Bertha's* Chinamen were all running forward, three of them well in advance of the others. In the rear Charlie was at grapples with a beach comber who fought with a knife in each hand, and Wilbur had a sudden glimpse of another sitting on the sand with his hand to his mouth, the blood spurting between his fingers.

Wilbur suddenly realized that he held a knife, and that he was directly abreast the sand rampart. How he got the knife he could not tell, though he afterward distinctly remembered throwing away his revolver, loaded as it was. He had leaped the breastworks, he knew that, and between him and the vast bright blue of the ocean he saw one of the beach combers backing away and watching him intently, his hatchet in his hand. Wilbur had only time to think that he himself would no doubt be killed within the next few moments, when this latter halted abruptly, took a step forward, and, instead of striking downward, as Wilbur had anticipated, dropped upon his knee and struck with all his might at the calf of Wilbur's leg. It was only the thickness of his boots that saved Wilbur from being hamstrung where he stood. As it was, he felt the blade bite almost to the bone, and heard the blood squelch in the sole of his

boot, as he staggered for the moment, almost tripping over the man in front of him.

The Chinaman sprang to his feet again, but Wilbur was at him in an instant, feeling instinctively that his chance was to close with his man, and so bring his own superior weight and strength to bear. Again and again he tried to run in and grip the slim yellow body, but the other dodged and backed away, as hard to hold as any fish. All around and back of him now Wilbur heard the hideous sound of stamping and struggling, and the noise of hoarse, quick shouts and the rebound of bodies falling and rolling upon the hard, smooth beach. The thing had not been a farce, after all. This was fighting at last, and there within arm's length were men grappling and gripping and hitting one another, each honestly striving to kill his fellow—Chinamen all, fighting in barbarous Oriental fashion with nails and teeth when the knife or hatchet failed. What did he, clubman and college-man, in that hideous trouble that wrought itself out there on that heat-stricken tropic beach under that morning's sun?

Suddenly there was a flash of red flame, and a billow of thick, yellow smoke filled all the air. The cabin was afire. The hatchet-man with whom Wilbur was fighting had been backing in this direction. He was close in when the fire began to leap from the one window; now he could go no farther. He turned to run sideways between his enemy and the burning cabin. Wilbur thrust his foot sharply forward; the beach comber tripped, staggered, and before he had reached the ground Wilbur had driven home the knife.

Then suddenly, at the sight of his smitten enemy rolling on the ground at his feet, the primitive man, the half-brute of the stone age, leaped to life in Wilbur's breast—he felt his muscles thrilling with a strength they had not known before. His nerves, stretched tense as

harp-strings, were vibrating to a new tune. His blood spun through his veins till his ears roared with the rush of it. Never had he conceived of such savage exultation as that which mastered him at that instant. The knowledge that he could kill filled him with a sense of power that was veritably royal. He felt physically larger. It was the joy of battle, the horrid exhilaration of killing, the animal of the race, the human brute suddenly aroused and dominating every instinct and tradition of centuries of civilization. The fight still was going forward.

Wilbur could hear the sounds of it, though from where he stood all sight was shut off by the smoke of the burning house. As he turned about, knife in hand, debating what next he should do, a figure burst down upon him, shadowy and distorted through the haze.

It was Moran, but Moran as Wilbur had never seen her before. Her eyes were blazing under her thick frown like fire under a bush. Her arms were bared to the elbow, her heavy ropes of hair flying and coiling from her in all directions, while with a voice hoarse from shouting she sang, or rather chanted, in her long-forgotten Norse tongue, fragments of old sagas, words, and sentences, meaningless even to herself. The fury of battle had exalted her to a sort of frenzy. She was beside herself with excitement. Once more she had lapsed back to the Vikings and sea-rovers of the tenth century—she was Brunhilde again, a shield-maiden, a Valkyrie, a berserker, and the daughter of berserkers, and like them she fought in a veritable frenzy, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, every sense exalted, every force doubled, insensible to pain, deaf to all reason.

Her dirk uplifted, she rushed upon Wilbur, never once pausing in her chant. Wilbur shouted a warning to her as she came on, puzzled beyond words, startled back to a consciousness of himself again by this insensate attack.

"Moran! Moran!" he called. "What is it—you're wrong! It's I. It's Wilbur—your mate, can't you see?"

Moran could not see—blind to friend or foe, as she was deaf to reason, she struck at him with all the strength of her arm. But there was no skill in her fighting now. Wilbur dropped his own knife and gripped her right wrist. She closed with him upon the instant, clutching at his throat with her one free hand; and as he felt her strength—doubled and tripled in the fury of her madness—Wilbur knew that, however easily he had overcome his enemy of a moment before, he was now fighting for his very life.

At first, Wilbur merely struggled to keep her from him—to prevent her using her dirk. He tried not to hurt her. But what with the spirits he had drunk before the attack, what with the excitement of the attack itself and the sudden unleashing of the brute in him an instant before, the whole affair grew dim and hazy in his mind. He ceased to see things in their proportion. His new-found strength gloried in matching itself with another strength that was its equal. He fought with Moran—not as he would fight with either woman or man, or with anything human, for the matter of that. He fought with her as against some impersonal force that it was incumbent upon him to conquer—that it was imperative he should conquer if he wished to live. When she struck, he struck blow for blow, force for force, his strength against hers, glorying in that strange contest, though he never once forgot that this last enemy was the girl he loved. It was not Moran whom he fought; it was her force, her determination, her will, her splendid independence, that he set himself to conquer.

Already she had dropped or flung away the dirk, and their battle had become an issue of sheer physical strength between them. It was a question now as to who

should master the other. Twice she had fought Wilbur to his knees, the heel of her hand upon his face, his head thrust back between his shoulders, and twice he had wrenched away, rising to his feet again, panting, bleeding even, but with his teeth set and all his resolution at the sticking-point. Once he saw his chance, and planted his knuckles squarely between her eyes where her frown was knotted hard, hoping to stun her and end the fight once and for all. But the blow did not seem to affect her in the least. By this time he saw that her berserker rage had worked itself clear as fermenting wine clears itself, and that she knew now with whom she was fighting; and he seemed now to understand the incomprehensible, and to sympathize with her joy in measuring her strength against his; and yet he knew that the combat was deadly serious, and that more than life was at stake. Moran despised a weakling.

For an instant, as they fell apart, she stood off, breathing hard and rolling up her sleeve; then, as she started forward again, Wilbur met her halfway, caught her round the neck and under the arm, gripping her left wrist with his right hand behind her; then, exerting every ounce of strength he yet retained, he thrust her down and from him, until at length, using his hip as a pivot, he swung her off her feet, threw her fairly on her back, and held her so, one knee upon her chest, his hands closed vise-like on her wrists.

Then suddenly Moran gave up, relaxing in his grasp all in a second, and, to his great surprise, suddenly smiled.

"Ho! mate," she exclaimed; "that was a tough one; but I'm beaten—you're stronger than I thought for."

Wilbur released her and rose to his feet.

"Here," she continued, "give me your hand. I'm as weak as a kitten." As Wilbur helped her to her feet, she put her hand to her forehead, where his knuckles

had left their mark, and frowned at him, but not ill-naturedly.

"Next time you do that," she said, "use a rock or a belaying-pin, or something that won't hurt—not your fist, mate." She looked at him admiringly. "What a two-fisted, brawny dray-horse it is! I told you I was stronger than most men, didn't I? But I'm the weaker of us two, and that's a fact. You've beaten, mate—I admit it; you've conquered me, and—" she continued, smiling again and shaking him by the shoulder, "—and, mate, do you know, I love you for it."

CHAPTER XI

A CHANGE IN LEADERS

WELL," exclaimed Wilbur at length, the excitement of the fight returning upon him. "We have plenty to do yet. Come on, Moran."

It was no longer Moran who took the initiative—who was the leader. The brief fight upon the shore had changed all that. It was Wilbur who was now the master, it was Wilbur who was aggressive. He had known what it meant to kill. He was no longer afraid of anything, no longer hesitating. He had felt a sudden quadrupling of all his strength, moral and physical.

All that was strong and virile and brutal in him seemed to harden and stiffen in the moment after he had seen the beach comber collapse limply on the sand under that last strong knife-blow; and a sense of triumph, of boundless self-confidence, leaped within him, so that he shouted aloud in a very excess of exhilaration; and snatching up a heavy cutting-in spade, that had been dropped in the fight near the burning cabin, tossed it high into the air, catching it again as it descended, like any exultant savage.

"Come on!" he cried to Moran; "where are the beach combers gone? I'm going to get one more before the show is over."

The two passed out of the zone of smoke, and reached the other side of the burning cabin just in time to see the last of the struggle. The whole affair had not taken more than a quarter of an hour. In the end the beach combers had been beaten. Four had fled into the waste

of sand and sage that lay back of the shore, and had not been pursued. A fifth had been almost hamstrung by one of the *Bertha's* coolies, and had given himself up. A sixth, squealing and shrieking like a tiger-cat, had been made prisoner; and Wilbur himself had accounted for the seventh.

As Wilbur and Moran came around the cabin they saw the *Bertha Millner's* Chinamen in a group, not far from the water's edge, reassembled after the fight—panting and bloody, some of them bare to the belt, their weapons still in their hands. Here and there was a bandaged arm or head; but their number was complete—or no, was it complete?

"Ought to be one more," said Wilbur, anxiously hastening forward.

As the two came up the coolies parted, and Wilbur saw one of them, his head propped upon a rolled-up blouse, lying ominously still on the trampled sand.

"It's Charlie!" exclaimed Moran.

"Where's he hurt?" cried Wilbur to the group of coolies. "Jim!—where's Jim? Where's he hurt, Jim?"

Jim, the only member of the crew besides Charlie who could understand or speak English, answered:

"Kai-gingh him fin' pistol, you' pistol; Charlie him fight plenty; bime-by, when he no see, one-piece Kai-gingh he come up behin', shoot um Charlie in side—savvy?"

"Did he kill him? Is he dead?"

"No, I tink um die plenty soon; him no savvy nuttin' now, him all-same sleep. Plenty soon bime-by him sleep for good, I tink."

There was little blood to be seen when Wilbur gently unwrapped the torn sleeve of a blouse that had been used as a bandage. Just under the armpit was the mark of the bullet—a small puncture already closed, half hidden under a clot or two of blood. The coolie lay

quite unconscious, his eyes wide open, drawing a faint, quick breath at irregular intervals.

"What do you think, mate?" asked Moran in a low voice.

"I think he's got it through the lungs," answered Wilbur, frowning in distress and perplexity. "Poor old Charlie!"

Moran went down on a knee, and put a finger on the slim, corded wrist, yellow as old ivory.

"Charlie," she called, "Charlie, here, don't you know me? Wake up, old chap! It's Moran. You're not hurt so very bad, are you?"

Charlie's eyes closed and opened a couple of times.

"No can tell," he answered feebly; "hurt plenty big"; then he began to cough.

Wilbur drew a sigh of relief. "He's all right!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I think he's all right," assented Moran.

"First thing to do now is to get him aboard the schooner," said Wilbur. "We'll take him right across in the beach combers' dory here. By Jove!" he exclaimed on a sudden. "The ambergris—I'd forgotten all about it." His heart sank. In the hideous confusion of that morning's work, all thought of the loot had been forgotten. Had the battle been for nothing, after all? The moment the beach combers had been made aware of the meditated attack, it would have been an easy matter for them to have hidden the ambergris—destroyed it even.

In two strides Wilbur had reached the beach combers' dory and was groping in the forward cuddy. Then he uttered a great shout of satisfaction. The "stuff" was there, all of it, though the mass had been cut into quarters, three parts of it stowed in tea-flails, the fourth still reeved up in the hammock netting.

"We've got it!" he cried to Moran, who had followed him. "We've got it, Moran! Over \$100,000. We're rich—

rich as boodlers, you and I. Oh, it was worth fighting for, after all, wasn't it? Now we'll get out of here—now we'll cut for home."

"It's only Charlie I'm thinking about," answered Moran, hesitating. "If it wasn't for that we'd be all right. I don't know whether we did right, after all, in jumping the camp here. I wouldn't like to feel that I'd got Charlie into our quarrel only to have him killed."

Wilbur stared at this new Moran in no little amazement. Where was the reckless, untamed girl of the previous night, who had sworn at him and denounced his niggling misgivings as to right and wrong?

"Hoh!" he retorted impatiently, "Charlie's right enough. And, besides, I didn't force him to anything. I—we, that is, we took the same chances. If I hadn't done for my man there behind the cabin, he would have done for me. At all events, we carried our point. We got the loot. They took it from us, and we were strong enough to get it back."

Moran merely nodded, as though satisfied with his decision, and added:

"Well, what next, mate?"

"We'll get back to the *Bertha* now and put to sea as soon as we can catch the tide. I'll send Jim and two of the other men across in the dory with Charlie. The rest of us will go around by the shore. We've got to have a chin-chin with Hoang, if he don't get loose aboard there and fire the boat before we can get back. I don't propose taking these beach combers back to Frisco with us."

"What will we do with the two prisoners?" she asked.

"Let them go; we've got their arms."

The positions of the two were reversed. It was Wilbur who assumed control and direction of what went forward, Moran taking his advice and relying upon his judgment.

In accordance with Wilbur's orders, Charlie was carried aboard the dory, which, with two Chinamen at the oars, and the ambergris stowed again into the cuddy, at once set off for the schooner. Wilbur himself cut the ropes on the two prisoners, and bade them shift for themselves. The rest of the party returned to the *Bertha Millner* around the wide sweep of the beach.

It was only by high noon, under the flogging of a merciless sun, that the entire crew of the little schooner once more reassembled under the shadow of her stranded hulk. They were quite worn out; and as soon as Charlie was lifted aboard, and the ambergris—or, as they spoke of it now, the “loot”—was safely stowed in the cabin, Wilbur allowed the Chinamen three or four hours' rest. They had had neither breakfast nor dinner; but their exhaustion was greater than their hunger, and in a few moments the entire half-dozen were stretched out asleep on the forward deck in the shadow of the foresail, raised for the purpose of sheltering them. However, Wilbur and Moran sought out Hoang, whom they found as they had left him—bound upon the floor of the cabin.

“Now we have a talk—savvy?” Wilbur told him as he loosed the ropes about his wrists and ankles. “We got our loot back from you, old man, and we got one of your men into the bargain. You woke up the wrong crowd, Hoang, when you went up against this outfit. You're in a bad way, my friend. Your junk is wrecked; all your oil and blubber from the whale is lost; four of your men have run away, one is killed, another one we caught and let go, another one has been hamstrung; and you yourself are our prisoner, with your teeth filed down to your gums. Now,” continued Wilbur, with the profoundest gravity, “I hope this will be a lesson to you. Don't try and get too much the next time. Just be content with what is yours by right, or what you are

strong enough to keep, and don't try to fight white people. Other coolies, I don't say. But when you try to get the better of white people you are out of your class."

The little beach comber (he was scarcely above five feet) rubbed his chafed wrists, and fixed Wilbur with his tiny, twinkling eyes.

"What you do now?"

"We go home. I'm going to maroon you and your people here on this beach. You deserve that I should let you eat your fists by way of table-board; but I'm no such dirt as you. When our men left the schooner they brought off with them a good share of our provisions. I'll leave them here for you—and there's plenty of turtle and abalone to be had for the catching. Some of the American men-of-war, I believe, come down to this bay for target-practice twice a year, and if we speak any on the way up we'll ask them to call here for castaways. That's what I'll do for you, and that's all! If you don't like it, you can set out to march up the coast till you hit a town; but I wouldn't advise you to try it. Now what have you got to say?"

Hoang was silent. His queue had become unbound for half its length, and he plaited it anew, winking his eyes thoughtfully.

"Well, what do you say?" said Moran.

"I lose face," answered Hoang at length, calmly.

"You lose face? What do you mean?"

"I lose face," he insisted; then added: "I heap 'shamed. You fightee my China boy, you catchee me. My boy no mo' hab me fo' boss—savvy? I go back, him no likee me. Mebbe all same killee me. I lose face—no mo' boss."

"What a herd of wild cattle!" muttered Wilbur.

"There's something in what he says, don't you think, mate?" observed Moran, bringing a braid over each shoulder and stroking it according to her habit.

"We'll ask Jim about it," decided Wilbur.

But Jim at once confirmed Hoang's statement. "Oh, Kai-gingh kill um no-good boss, fo' sure," he declared.

"Don't you think, mate," said Moran, "we'd better take him up to Frisco with us? We've had enough fighting and killing."

So it was arranged that the defeated beach comber, the whipped buccaneer, who had "lost face" and no longer dared look his men in the eye, should be taken aboard.

By four o'clock next morning Wilbur had the hands at work digging the sand from around the *Bertha Millner's* bow. The line by which she was to be warped off was run out to the ledge of the rock; fresh water was taken on; provisions for the marooned beach combers were cached upon the beach; the dory was taken aboard, gaskets were cast off, and hatches battened down.

At high tide, all hands straining upon the warp, the schooner was floated off, and under touch of the lightest airs drew almost imperceptibly away from the land. They were quite an hour crawling out to the heads of the bay. But here the breeze was freshening. Moran took the wheel; the flying-jib and staysail were set; the wake began to whiten under the schooner's stern, the forefoot sang; the Pacific opened out more and more; and by 12:30 o'clock Moran put the wheel over, and, as the schooner's bow swung to the northward, cried to Wilbur:

"Mate, look your last of Magdalena Bay!"

Standing at her side, Wilbur turned and swept the curve of the coast with a single glance. The vast, heat-scourged hoop of yellow sand, the still, smooth shield of indigo water, with its beds of kelp, had become insensibly dear to him. It was all familiar, friendly, and hospitable. Hardly an acre of that sweep of beach that did not hold the impress of his foot. There was the point near by the creek where he and Moran first landed to

fill the water-casks and to gather abalones; the creek itself, where he had snared quail; the sand-spit, with its whitened whale's skull, where he and Moran had beached the schooner; and there, last of all, that spot of black over which still hung a haze of brown-gray smoke, the charred ruins of the old Portuguese whaling-cabin, where they had outfought the beach combers.

For a moment Wilbur and Moran looked back without speaking. They stood on the quarterdeck, in the shadow of the mainsail, shut off from the sight of the schooner's crew, and for the instant quite alone.

"Well, Moran, it's good-bye to the old place, isn't it?" said Wilbur at length.

"Yes," she said, her deep voice pitched even deeper than usual. "Mate, great things have happened there."

"It doesn't look like a place for a tong row with Chinese pirates, though, does it?" he said; but even as he spoke the words, he guessed that that was not what he meant.

"Oh, what did that amount to?" she said, with an impatient movement of her head. "It was there that I first knew myself; and knew that, after all, you were a man and I was a woman; and that there was just us—you and I—in the world; and that you loved me and I loved you, and that nothing else was worth thinking of."

Wilbur shut his hand down over hers as it gripped a spoke of the wheel.

"Moran, I knew that long since," he said. "Such a month as this has been! Why, I feel as though I had only begun to live since I began to love you."

"And you do, mate?" she answered. "You do love me, and always will? Oh! you don't know," she went on, interrupting his answer, "you haven't a guess, how the last two days have changed me. Something has happened here," and she put both her hands over her

breast. "I'm all different here, mate. It's all you inside here—all you! And it hurts, and I'm proud that it does hurt. Oh!" she cried, of a sudden, "I don't know how to love yet, and I do it very badly, and I can't tell you how I feel, because I can't even tell it to myself. But you must be good to me now." The deep voice trembled a little. "Good to me, mate, and true to me, mate, because I've only you, and all of me is yours. Mate, be good to me, and always be kind to me. I'm not Moran any more. I'm not proud and strong and independent, and I don't want to be lonely. I want you—I want you always with me. I'm just a woman now, dear—just a woman that loves you with a heart she's just found."

Wilbur could find no words to answer. There was something so pathetic and at the same time so noble in Moran's complete surrender of herself, and her dependence upon him, her unquestioned trust in him and his goodness, that he was suddenly smitten with awe at the sacredness of the obligation thus imposed on him. She was his now, to have and to hold, to keep, to protect, and to defend—she who was once so glorious of her strength, of her savage isolation, her inviolate, pristine maidenhood. All words seemed futile and inadequate to him.

She came close to him, and put her hands upon his shoulders, and, looking him squarely in the eye, said:

"You do love me, mate, and you always will?"

"Always, Moran," said Wilbur, simply. He took her in his arms, and she laid her cheek against his for a moment, then took his head between her hands and kissed him.

Two days passed. The *Bertha Millner* held steadily to her northward course, Moran keeping her well in toward the land. Wilbur maintained a lookout from the crow's nest in the hope of sighting some white cruiser or battleship on her way south for target-practice.

In the cache of provisions he had left for the beach combers he had inserted a message, written by Hoang, to the effect that they might expect to be taken off by a United States man-of-war within the month.

Hoang did not readily recover his "loss of face." The *Bertha's* Chinamen would have nothing to do with this member of a hostile tong; and the humiliated beach comber kept almost entirely to himself, sitting on the fo'c'sle-head all day long, smoking his sui-yen-hu and brooding silently to himself.

Moran had taken the lump of ambergris from out Kitchell's old hammock, and had slung the hammock itself in the schooner's waist, and Charlie was made as comfortable as possible therein. They could do but little for him, however; and he was taken from time to time with spells of coughing that racked him with a dreadful agony. At length, one noon, just after Moran had taken the sun and had calculated that the *Bertha* was some eight miles to the southwest of San Diego, she was surprised to hear Wilbur calling her sharply. She ran to him and found him standing in the waist by Charlie's hammock.

The Chinaman was dying, and knew it. He was talking in a faint and feeble voice to Wilbur as she came up, and was trying to explain to him that he was sorry he had deserted the schooner during the scare in the bay.

"Plenty muchee solly," he said; "China boy, him heap flaid of Feng-shui. When Feng-shui no likee, we then must go chop-chop. Plenty much solly I leave um schooner that night; solly plenty—savvy?"

"Of course we savvy, Charlie," said Moran. "You weren't afraid when it came to fighting."

"I die pletty soon," said Charlie calmly. "You say you giv me fifteen hunded dollah?"

"Yes, yes; that was our promise. What do you want done with it, Charlie?"

"I want plenty fine funeral in Chinatown in San Flancisco. Oh, heap fine! You buy um first-chop coffin—savvy? Silver heap much—cost um big money. You gib my money to Hop Sing Association, topside Ming Yen temple. You savvy Hop Sing?—one Six Companies."

"Yes, yes."

"Tell um Hop Sing I want funeral—four-piecee horse. You no flogettee horse?" he added apprehensively.

"No, I'll not forget the horses, Charlie. You shall have four."

"Want six-piecee band musicians—China music—heap plenty gong. You no flogettee? Two-piecee priest, all dress um white—savvy? You mus' buy um coffin yo'self. Velly fine coffin, heap much silver, an' four-piecee horse. You catch um fireclacker—one, five, seven hunded fireclacker, make um big noise; an' loast pig, an' plenty lice an' China blandy. Heap fine funeral, cost um fifteen hunded dollah. I be bury all same Mandarin—all same Little Pete. You plomise, sure?"

"I promise you, Charlie. You shall have a funeral finer than Little Pete's."

Charlie nodded his head contentedly, drawing a breath of satisfaction.

"Bimeby Hop Sing send um body back China." He closed his eyes and lay for a long time, worn out with the effort of speaking, as if asleep. Suddenly he opened his eyes wide. "You no flogettee horse?"

"Four horses, Charlie. I'll remember."

He drooped once more, only to rouse again at the end of a few minutes with:

"First-chop coffin, plenty much silver"; and again, a little later and very feebly: "Six-piecee—band music—China music—four-piecee—gong—four."

"I promise you, Charlie," said Wilbur.

"Now," answered Charlie, "now I die."

And the low-caste Cantonese coolie, with all the

dignity and calmness of a Cicero, composed himself for death.

An hour later Wilbur and Moran knew that he was dead. Yet, though they had never left the hammock, they could not have told at just what moment he died.

Later, on that same afternoon, Wilbur, from the crow's nest, saw the lighthouse on Point Loma and the huge rambling bulk of the Coronado Hotel spreading out and along the beach.

It was the outpost of civilization. They were getting back to the world again. Within an hour's ride of the hotel were San Diego, railroads, newspapers, and policemen. Just off the hotel, however, Wilbur could discern the gleaming white hull of a United States man-of-war. With the glass he could make her out to be one of the monitors—the *Monterey* in all probability.

After advising with Moran, it was decided to put in to land. The report as to the castaways could be made to the *Monterey*, and Charlie's body forwarded to his tong in San Francisco.

In two hours' time the schooner was well up, and Wilbur stood by Moran's side at the wheel, watching and studying the familiar aspect of Coronado Beach.

"It's a great winter resort," he told her. "I was down here with a party two years ago. Nothing has changed. You see that big sort of round wing, Moran, all full of windows? That's the dining room. And there's the bath-house and the bowling-alley. See the people on the beach and the girls in white duck skirts; and look up there by the veranda—let me take the glass—yes, there's a tally-ho coach. Isn't it queer to get back to this sort of thing after Magdalena Bay and the beach combers?"

Moran spun the wheel without reply, and gave an order to Jim to ease off the foresheet.

CHAPTER XII

NEW CONDITIONS

THE winter season at the Hotel del Coronado had been unusually gay that year, and the young lady who wrote the society news in diary form for one of the San Francisco weekly papers had held forth at much length upon the hotel's "unbroken succession of festivities." She had also noted that "prominent among the newest arrivals" had been Mr. Nat Ridgeway, of San Francisco, who had brought down from the city, aboard his elegant and sumptuously fitted yacht *Petrel*, a jolly party, composed largely of the season's débutantes. To be mentioned in the latter category was Miss Josie Herrick, whose lavender coming-out tea at the beginning of the season was still a subject of comment among the gossips—and all the rest of it.

The *Petrel* had been in the harbour but a few days, and on this evening a dance was given at the hotel in honour of her arrival. It was to be a cotillon, and Nat Ridgeway was going to lead with Josie Herrick. There had been a coaching party to Tia Juana that day, and Miss Herrick had returned to the hotel only in time to dress. By 9:30 she emerged from the process—which had involved her mother, her younger sister, her maid, and one of the hotel chambermaids—a dainty, firm-corseted little body, all tulle, white satin, and high-piled hair. She carried Maréchal Niel roses, ordered by wire from Monterey; and about an hour later, when Ridgeway gave the nod to the waiting musicians, and swung her off to the beat of a two-step, there was not a more grace-

ful little figure upon the floor of the incomparable round ballroom of the Coronado Hotel.

The cotillon was a great success. The ensigns and younger officers of the monitor—at that time anchored off the hotel—attended in uniform; and enough of the members of what was known in San Francisco as the “dancing set” were present to give the affair the necessary entrain. Even Jerry Haight, who belonged more distinctly to the “country-club set,” and who had spent the early part of that winter shooting elk in Oregon, was among the ranks of the “rovers,” who grouped themselves about the draughty doorways, and endeavoured to appear unconscious each time Ridgeway gave the signal for a “break.”

The figures had gone round the hall once. The “first set” was out again, and as Ridgeway guided Miss Herrick by the “rovers” she looked over the array of shirt-fronts, searching for Jerry Haight.

“Do you see Mr. Haight?” she asked of Ridgeway. “I wanted to favour him this break. I owe him two already, and he’ll never forgive me if I overlook him now.”

Jerry Haight had gone to the hotel office for a few moments’ rest and a cigarette, and was nowhere in sight. But when the set broke, and Miss Herrick, despairing of Jerry, had started out to favour one of the younger ensigns, she suddenly jostled against him, pushing his way eagerly across the floor in the direction of the musicians’ platform.

“Oh!” she cried, “Mr. Haight, you’ve missed your chance—I’ve been looking for you.”

But Jerry did not hear—he seemed very excited. He crossed the floor, almost running, and went up on the platform where the musicians were meandering softly through the mazes of “La Paloma,” and brought them to an abrupt silence.

"Here, I say, Haight!" exclaimed Ridgeway, who was near by, "you can't break up my figure like that."

"Gi' me a call there on the bugle," said Haight rapidly to the cornetist. "Anything to make 'em keep quiet a moment."

The cornetist sounded a couple of notes, and the cotillon paused in the very act of the break. The shuffling of feet grew still, and the conversation ceased. A diamond brooch had been found, no doubt, or some supper announcement was to be made. But Jerry Haight, with a great sweep of his arm, the forgotten cigarette between his fingers, shouted out breathlessly:

"Ross Wilbur is out in the office of the hotel!"

There was an instant's silence, and then a great shout. Wilbur found! Ross Wilbur come back from the dead! Ross Wilbur, hunted for and bootlessly traced from Buenos Aires in the south to the Aleutian Islands in the north. Ross Wilbur, the puzzle of every detective bureau on the coast; the subject of a thousand theories; whose name had figured in the scare-heads of every newspaper west of the Mississippi. Ross Wilbur, seen at a fashionable tea and his club of an afternoon, then suddenly blotted out from the world of men: swallowed up and engulfed by the unknown, with not so much as a button left behind. Ross Wilbur, the suicide; Ross Wilbur, the murdered; Ross Wilbur, victim of a band of kidnappers, the hero of some dreadful story that was never to be told, the mystery, the legend—behold he was there! Back from the unknown, dropped from the clouds, spewed up again from the bowels of the earth—a veritable god from the machine who in a single instant was to disentangle all the unexplained complications of those past winter months.

"Here he comes!" shouted Jerry, his eyes caught by a group of men in full dress and gold lace who came tramping down the hall to the ballroom, bearing a nondescript

figure on their shoulders. "Here he comes—the boys are bringing him in here! Oh!" he cried, turning to the musicians, "can't you play something?—anything! Hit it up for all you're worth! Ridgeway—Nat, look here! Ross was Yale, y' know—Yale '95; ain't we enough Yale men here to give him the yell?"

Out of all time and tune, but with a vigour that made up for both, the musicians banged into a patriotic air. Jerry, standing on a chair that itself was standing on the platform, led half a dozen frantic men in the long thunder of the "Brek-kek-kek-kex, co-ex, co-ex."

Around the edges of the hall excited girls, and chaperons themselves no less agitated, were standing up on chairs and benches, splitting their gloves and breaking their fans in their enthusiasm; while every male dancer on the floor—ensigns in their gold-faced uniforms and "rovers" in starched and immaculate shirt-bosoms—cheered and cheered and struggled with one another to shake hands with a man whom two of their number—old Yale grads with memories of athletic triumphs yet in their minds—carried into that ballroom, borne high upon their shoulders.

And the hero of the occasion, the centre of all this enthusiasm—thus carried as if in triumph into this assembly in evening dress, in white tulle and whiter kid, odorous of delicate sachets and scarce-perceptible perfumes—was a figure unhandsome and unkempt beyond description. His hair was long, and hanging over his eyes. A thick, uncared-for beard concealed the mouth and chin. He was dressed in a Chinaman's blouse and jeans—the latter thrust into slashed and tattered boots. The tan and weatherbeatings of nearly half a year of the tropics were spread over his face; a partly healed scar disfigured one temple and cheek-bone; the hands, to the very finger-nails, were gray with grime; the jeans and blouse and boots were fouled with grease, with oil, with

pitch, and all manner of the dirt of an uncared-for ship. And as the dancers of the cotillon pressed about, and a hundred kid-gloved hands stretched toward his own palms, there fell from Wilbur's belt upon the waxed floor of the ballroom the knife he had so grimly used in the fight upon the beach, the ugly stains still blackening on the haft.

There was no more cotillon that night. They put him down at last; and in half a dozen sentences Wilbur told them of how he had been shanghaied—told them of Magdalena Bay, his fortune in the ambergris, and the fight with the beach combers.

"You people are going down there for target-practice, aren't you?" he said, turning to one of the *Monterey's* officers in the crowd about him. "Yes? Well, you'll find the coolies there, on the beach, waiting for you. All but one," he added, grimly.

"We marooned six of them, but the seventh didn't need to be marooned. They tried to plunder us of our boat, but by——, we made it interesting for 'em!"

"I say, steady, old man!" exclaimed Nat Ridgeway, glancing nervously toward the girls in the surrounding group. "This isn't Magdalena Bay, you know."

And for the first time Wilbur felt a genuine pang of disappointment and regret as he realized that it was not.

Half an hour later, Ridgeway drew him aside. "I say, Ross, let's get out of here. You can't stand here talking all night. Jerry and you and I will go up to my rooms, and we can talk there in peace. I'll order up three quarts of fizz, and——"

"Oh, rot your fizz!" declared Wilbur. "If you love me, give me Christian tobacco."

As they were going out of the ballroom, Wilbur caught sight of Josie Herrick, and, breaking away from the others, ran over to her.

"Oh!" she cried, breathless. "To think and to think

of your coming back, after all! No, I don't realize it—I can't. It will take me until morning to find out that you've really come back. I just know now that I'm happier than I ever was in my life before. Oh!" she cried, "do I need to tell you how glad I am? It's just too splendid for words. Do you know, I was thought to be the last person you had ever spoken to while alive, and the reporters and all—oh, but we must have such a talk when all are quiet again! And our dance—we've never had our dance. I've got your card yet. Remember the one you wrote for me at the tea—a facsimile of it was published in all the papers. You are going to be a hero when you get back to San Francisco. Oh, Ross! Ross!" she cried, the tears starting to her eyes, "you've really come back, and you are just as glad as I am, aren't you—glad that you've come back—come back to me?"

Later on, in Ridgeway's room, Wilbur told his story again more in detail to Ridgeway and Jerry. All but one portion of it. He could not make up his mind to speak to them—these society fellows, clubmen and city bred—of Moran. How he was going to order his life henceforward—his life, that he felt to be void of interest without her—he did not know. That was a question for later consideration.

"We'll give another cotillon!" exclaimed Ridgeway, "up in the city—give it for you, Ross, and you'll lead. It'll be the event of the season!"

Wilbur uttered an exclamation of contempt. "I've done with that sort of foolery," he answered.

"Nonsense; why, think, we'll have it in your honour. Every smart girl in town will come, and you'll be the lion of——"

"You don't seem to understand!" cried Wilbur impatiently. "Do you think there's any fun in that for me now? Why, man, I've fought—fought with a naked dirk, fought with a coolie who snapped at me like an ape—

and you talk to me of dancing and functions and german favours! It wouldn't do some of you people a bit of harm if you were shanghaied yourselves. That sort of life, if it don't do anything else, knocks a big bit of seriousness into you. You fellows make me sick," he went on vehemently. "As though there wasn't anything else to do but lead cotillions and get up new figures!"

"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Nat Ridgeway. "Where are you going now—back to Magdalena Bay?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

Wilbur smote the table with his fist.

"Cuba!" he cried. "I've got a crack little schooner out in the bay here, and I've got a hundred thousand dollars' worth of loot aboard of her. I've tried beach combing for a while, and now I'll try filibustering. It may be a crazy idea, but it's better than dancing. I'd rather lead an expedition than a german, and you can chew on that, Nathaniel Ridgeway."

Jerry looked at him as he stood there before them in the filthy, reeking blouse and jeans, the ragged boots, and the mane of hair and tangled beard, and remembered the Wilbur he used to know—the Wilbur of the carefully creased trousers, the satin scarfs, and fancy waistcoats.

"You're a different sort than when you went away, Ross," said Jerry.

"Right you are," answered Wilbur.

"But I will venture a prophecy," continued Jerry, looking keenly at him. "Ross, you are a born-and-bred city man. It's in the blood of you and the bones of you. I'll give you three years for this new notion of yours to wear itself out. You think just now you're going to spend the rest of your life as an amateur buccaneer.

In three years, at the outside, you'll be using your 'loot,' as you call it or the interest of it, to pay your taxes and your tailor, your pew rent and your club dues, and you'll be what the biographers call 'a respectable member of the community.'"

"Did you ever kill a man, Jerry?" asked Wilbur. "No? Well, you kill one some day—kill him in a fair give-and-take fight—and see how it makes you feel, and what influence it has on you, and then come back and talk to me."

It was long after midnight. Wilbur rose.

"We'll ring for a boy," said Ridgeway, "and get you a room. I can fix you out with clothes enough in the morning."

Wilbur stared in some surprise, and then said:

"Why, I've got the schooner to look after. I can't leave those coolies alone all night."

"You don't mean to say you're going on board at this time in the morning?"

"Of course!"

"Why—but—but you'll catch your death of cold."

Wilbur stared at Ridgeway, then nodded helplessly, and, scratching his head, said half aloud:

"No, what's the use; I can't make 'em understand. Good-night. I'll see you in the morning."

"We'll all come out and visit you on your yacht," Ridgeway called after him; but Wilbur did not hear.

In answer to Wilbur's whistle, Jim came in with the dory and took him off to the schooner. Moran met him as he came over the side.

"I took the watch myself to-night and let the boy turn in," she said. "How is it ashore, mate?"

"We've come back to the world of little things, Moran," said Wilbur. "But we'll pull out of here in the morning and get back to the places where things are real."

"And that's a good hearing, mate."

"Let's get up here on the quarterdeck," added Wilbur. "I've something to propose to you."

Moran laid an arm across his shoulder, and the two walked aft. For half an hour Wilbur talked to her earnestly about his new idea of filibustering; and as he told her of the war he warmed to the subject, his face glowing, his eyes sparkling. Suddenly, however, he broke off.

"But no!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand, Moran. How can you—you're foreign-born. It's no affair of yours!"

"Mate! mate!" cried Moran, her hands upon his shoulders. "It's you who don't understand—don't understand me. Don't you know—can't you see? Your people are mine now. I'm happy only in your happiness. You were right—the best happiness is the happiness one shares. And your sorrows belong to me, just as I belong to you, dear. Your enemies are mine, and your quarrels are my quarrels." She drew his head quickly toward her and kissed him.

In the morning the two had made up their minds to a certain vague course of action. To get away—anywhere—was their one aim. Moran was by nature a creature unfit for civilization, and the love of adventure and the desire for action had suddenly leaped to life in Wilbur's blood and was not to be resisted. They would get up to San Francisco, dispose of their "loot," outfit the *Bertha Millner* as a filibuster, and put to sea again. They had discussed the advisability of rounding the Horn in so small a ship as the *Bertha Millner*, but Moran had settled that at once.

"I've got to know her pretty well," she told Wilbur. "She's sound as a nut. Only let's get away from this place."

But toward ten o'clock on the morning after their

arrival off Coronado, and just as they were preparing to get under way, Hoang touched Wilbur's elbow.

"See um lil one-piece smoke-boat; him come chop-chop."

In fact, a little steam-launch was rapidly approaching the schooner. In another instant she was alongside. Jerry, Nat Ridgeway, Josie Herrick, and an elderly woman, whom Wilbur barely knew as Miss Herrick's married sister, were aboard.

"We've come off to see your yacht!" cried Miss Herrick to Wilbur as the launch bumped along the schooner's counter. "Can we come aboard?" She looked very pretty in her crisp link shirt-waist, her white duck skirt, and white kid shoes, her sailor hat tilted at a barely perceptible angle. The men were in white flannels and smart yachting suits. "Can we come aboard?" she repeated.

Wilbur gasped and stared. "Good Lord!" he muttered. "Oh, come along," he added, desperately.

The party came over the side.

"Oh, my!" said Miss Herrick blankly, stopping short.

The decks, masts, and rails of the schooner were shiny with a black coating of dirt and grease; the sails were gray with grime; a strangling odour of oil and tar, of cooking and of opium, of Chinese punk and drying fish, pervaded all the air. In the waist, Hoang and Jim, bare to the belt, their queues looped around their necks to be out of the way, were stowing the dory and exchanging high-pitched monosyllables. Miss Herrick's sister had not come aboard. The three visitors—Jerry, Ridgeway, and Josie—stood nervously huddled together, their elbows close in, as if to avoid contact with the prevailing filth, their immaculate white outing-clothes detaching themselves violently against the squalor and sordid grime of the schooner's background.

"Oh, my!" repeated Miss Herrick in dismay, half

closing her eyes. "To think of what you must have been through! I thought you had some kind of a yacht. I had no idea it would be like this." And as she spoke, Moran came suddenly upon the group from behind the foresail, and paused in abrupt surprise, her thumbs in her belt.

She still wore men's clothes and was booted to the knee. The heavy blue woollen shirt was open at the throat, the sleeves rolled halfway up her large white arms. In her belt she carried her haftless Scandinavian dirk. She was hatless as ever, and her heavy, fragrant cables of rye-hued hair fell over her shoulders and breast to far below her belt.

Miss Herrick started sharply, and Moran turned an inquiring glance upon Wilbur. Wilbur took his resolution in both hands.

"Miss Herrick," he said, "this is Moran—Moran Sternersen."

Moran took a step forward, holding out her hand. Josie, all bewildered, put her tight-gloved fingers into the calloused palm, looking up nervously into Moran's face.

"I'm sure," she said feebly, almost breathlessly, "I—I'm sure I'm very pleased to meet Miss Sternersen."

It was long before the picture left Wilbur's imagination. Josie Herrick, petite, gowned in white, crisp from her maid's grooming; and Moran, sea-rover and daughter of an hundred Vikings, towering above her, booted and belted, gravely clasping Josie's hand in her own huge fist.

CHAPTER XIII

MORAN STERNERSEN

SAN FRANCISCO once more! For two days the *Bertha Millner* had been beating up the coast, fighting her way against northerly winds, butting into head seas.

The warmth, the stillness, the placid drowsing quiet of Magdalena Bay, steaming under the golden eye of a tropic heaven, the white, baked beach, the bayheads, striated with the mirage in the morning, the coruscating sunset, the enchanted mystery of the purple night, with its sheen of stars and riding moon, were now replaced by the hale and vigorous snorting of the trades, the roll of breakers to landward, and the unremitting gallop of the unnumbered multitudes of gray-green seas, careering silently past the schooner, their crests occasionally hissing into brusque eruptions of white froth, or smiting broad on under her counter, showering her decks with a spout of icy spray. It was cold; at times thick fogs cloaked all the world of water. To the east, a procession of bleak hills defiled slowly southward; lighthouses were passed; streamers of smoke on the western horizon marked the passage of steamships; and once they met and passed close by a huge Cape Horner, a great deep-sea tramp, all sails set and drawing, rolling slowly and leisurely in seas that made the schooner dance.

At last the Farallones looked over the ocean's edge to the north; then came the whistling-buoy, the Seal Rocks, the Heads, Point Reyes, the Golden Gate flanked with the old red Presidio, Lime Point with its watching cannon; and by noon of a gray and boisterous day,

under a lusty wind and a slant of rain, just five months after her departure, the *Bertha Millner* let go her anchor in San Francisco Bay some few hundred yards off the Lifeboat Station.

In this berth the schooner was still three or four miles from the city and the water-front. But Moran detested any nearer approach to civilization, and Wilbur himself was willing to avoid, at least for one day, the publicity which he believed the *Bertha's* reappearance was sure to attract. He remembered, too, that the little boat carried with her a fortune of \$100,000, and decided that until it could be safely landed and stored it was not desirable that its existence should be known along "the Front."

For days, weeks even, Wilbur had looked eagerly forward to this return to his home. He had seen himself again in his former haunts, in his club, and in the houses along Pacific Avenue where he was received; but no sooner had the anchor-chain ceased rattling in the *Bertha's* hawse-pipe than a strange revulsion came upon him. The new man that seemed to have so suddenly sprung to life within him, the Wilbur who was the mate of the *Bertha Millner*, the Wilbur who belonged to Moran, believed that he could see nothing to be desired in city life. For him was the unsteady deck of a schooner, and the great winds and the tremendous wheel of the ocean's rim, and the horizon that ever fled before his following prow; so he told himself, so he believed. What attractions could the city offer him? What amusements? what excitements? He had been flung off the smoothly spinning circumference of well-ordered life out into the void.

He had known romance, and the spell of the great, simple, and primitive emotions; he had sat down to eat with buccaneers; he had seen the fierce, quick leap of unleashed passions, and had felt death swoop close at

his nape and pass like a swift spurt of cold air. City life, his old life, had no charm for him now. Wilbur honestly believed that he was changed to his heart's core. He thought that, like Moran, he was henceforth to be a sailor of the sea, a rover, and he saw the rest of his existence passed with her, aboard their faithful little schooner. They would have the whole round world 'as their playground; they held the earth and the great seas in fief; there was no one to let or to hinder. They two belonged to each other. Once outside the Heads again, and they swept the land of cities and of little things behind them, and they two were left alone once more; alone in the great world of romance.

About an hour after her arrival off the station, while Hoang and the hands were furling the jib and foresail and getting the dory over the side, Moran remarked to Wilbur:

"It's good we came in when we did, mate; the glass is going down fast, and the wind's breezing up from the west; we're going to have a blow; the tide will be going out in a little while, and we never could have come in against wind and tide."

"Moran," said Wilbur, "I'm going ashore—into the station here; there's a telephone line there; see the wires? I can't so much as turn my hand over before I have some shore-going clothes. What do you suppose they would do to me if I appeared on Kearney Street in this outfit? I'll ring up Langley & Michaels—they are the wholesale chemists in town—and have their agent come out here and talk business to us about our ambergris. We've got to pay the men their prize-money; then as soon as we get our own money in hand we can talk about overhauling and outfitting the *Bertha*."

Moran refused to accompany him ashore and into the Lifeboat Station. Roofed houses were an object of suspicion to her. Already she had begun to be uneasy at

the distant sight of the city of San Francisco, Nob, Telegraph, Russian, and Rincon hills, all swarming with buildings and grooved with streets; even the landlocked harbour fretted her. Wilbur could see she felt imprisoned, confined. When he had pointed out the Palace Hotel to her—a vast gray cube in the distance, overtopping the surrounding roofs—she had sworn under her breath.

“And people can live there, good heavens! Why not rabbit-burrows, and be done with it? Mate, how soon can we be out to sea again? I hate this place.”

Wilbur found the captain of the Lifeboat Station in the act of sitting down to a dinner of boiled beef and cabbage. He was a strongly built, well-looking man, with the air more of a soldier than a sailor. He had already been studying the schooner through his front window and had recognized her, and at once asked Wilbur news of Captain Kitchell. Wilbur told him as much of his story as was necessary, but from the captain’s talk he gathered that the news of his return had long since been wired from Coronado, and that it would be impossible to avoid a nine-days’ notoriety. The captain of the station (his name was Hodgson) made Wilbur royally welcome, insisted upon his dining with him, and himself called up Langley & Michaels as soon as the meal was over.

It was he who offered the only plausible solution of the mystery of the lifting and shaking of the schooner and the wrecking of the junk. Though Wilbur was not satisfied with Hodgson’s explanation, it was the only one he ever heard.

When he had spoken of the matter, Hodgson had nodded his head. “Sulphur-bottoms,” he said.

“Sulphur-bottoms?”

“Yes, they’re a kind of right whale; they get barnacle and a kind of marine lice on their backs, and come up

and scratch themselves against a ship's keel just like a hog under a fence."

When Wilbur's business was done, and he was making ready to return to the schooner, Hodgson remarked suddenly: "Hear you've got a strapping fine girl aboard with you. Where did you fall in with her?" and he winked and grinned.

Wilbur started as though struck, and took himself hurriedly away; but the man's words had touched off in his brain a veritable mine of conjecture. Moran in Magdalena Bay was consistent, congruous, and fitted into her environment. But how—how was Wilbur to explain her to San Francisco, and how could his behaviour seem else than ridiculous to the men of his club and to the women whose dinner invitations he was wont to receive? They could not understand the change that had been wrought in him; they did not know Moran, the savage, half-tamed Valkyrie so suddenly become a woman. Hurry as he would, the schooner could not be put to sea again within a fortnight. Even though he elected to live aboard in the meanwhile, the very business of her preparation would call him to the city again and again. Moran could not be kept a secret. As it was, all the world knew of her by now. On the other hand, he could easily understand her position; to her it seemed simplicity itself that they two who loved each other should sail away and pass their lives together upon the sea, as she and her father had done before.

Like most men, Wilbur had to walk when he was thinking hard. He sent the dory back to the schooner with word to Moran that he would take a walk around the beach and return in an hour or two. He set off along the shore in the direction of Fort Mason, the old red-brick fort at the entrance to the Golden Gate. At this point in the Presidio Government reservation the land is solitary. Wilbur followed the line of the beach to the old

fort; and there on the very threshold of the Western world, at the very outpost of civilization, sat down in the lee of the crumbling fortification, and scene by scene reviewed the extraordinary events of the past six months.

In front of him ran the narrow channel of the Golden Gate; to his right was the bay and the city; at his left, the open Pacific.

He saw himself the day of his advent aboard the *Bertha* in his top hat and frock coat; saw himself later "braking down" at the windlass, the *Petrel* within hailing distance.

Then the pictures began to thicken fast: the derelict bark, *Lady Letty*, rolling to her scuppers, abandoned and lonely; the "boy" in the wheel-box; Kitchell wrenching open the desk in the captain's stateroom; Captain Sternersen buried at sea, his false teeth upside down; the black fury of the squall, and Moran at the wheel; Moran lying at full length on the deck, getting the altitude of a star; Magdalena Bay; the shark-fishing; the mysterious lifting and shuddering of the schooner; the beach combers' junk, with its staring red eyes; Hoang, naked to the waist, gleaming with sweat and whale-oil; the ambergris; the race to beach the sinking schooner; the never-to-be forgotten night when he and Moran had camped together on the beach; Hoang taken prisoner, and the hideous filing of his teeth; the beach combers, silent and watchful behind their sand breastworks; the Chinaman he had killed twitching and hiccoughing at his feet; Moran turned Berserk, bursting down upon him through a haze of smoke; Charlie dying in the hammock aboard the schooner, ordering his funeral with its "four-piecee horse"; Coronado; the incongruous scene in the ball-room; and, last of all, Josie Herrick in white duck and kid shoes, giving her hand to Moran in her boots and belt, hatless as ever, her sleeves rolled up to above the

elbows, her white, strong arm extended, her ruddy face, and pale, milk-blue eyes gravely observant, her heavy braids, yellow as ripening rye, hanging over shoulder and breast.

A sudden explosion of cold wind, striking down blanket-wise and bewildering from out the west, made Wilbur look up quickly. The gray sky seemed scudding along close overhead. The bay, the narrow channel of the Golden Gate, the outside ocean, were all whitening with crests of waves. At his feet the huge green ground-swells thundered to the attack of the fort's granite foundations. Through the Gate, the bay seemed rushing out to the Pacific. A bewildered gull shot by, tacking and slanting against the gusts that would drive it out to sea. Evidently the storm was not far off. Wilbur rose to his feet, and saw the *Bertha Millner*, close in, unbridled and free as a runaway horse, headed directly for the open sea, and rushing on with all the impetus of wind and tide!

CHAPTER XIV

THE OCEAN IS CALLING FOR YOU

A LITTLE while after Wilbur had set off from the station, while Moran was making the last entries in the log-book, seated at the table in the cabin, Jim appeared at the door.

"Well," she said, looking up.

"China boy him want go ashore plenty big, see um flen up Chinatown in um city."

"Shore leave, is it?" said Moran. "You deserted once before without even saying good-bye; and my hand in the fire, you'll come back this time dotty with opium. Get away with you. We'll have men aboard here in a few days."

"Can go?" inquired Jim suavely.

"I said so. Report our arrival to your Six Companies."

Hoang rowed Jim and the coolies ashore, and then returned to the schooner with the dory and streamed her astern. As he passed the cabin door on his way forward, Moran hailed him.

"I thought you went ashore?" she cried.

"Heap flaid," he answered. "Him other boy go up Chinatown; him tell Sam Yup; I tink Sam Yup alla same killee me. I no leave um ship two, thlee day; bimeby I go Olegon. I stay topside ship. You want um cook, I cook plenty fine; stand um watch for you."

Indeed, ever since leaving Coronado the ex-beach comber had made himself very useful about the schooner; had been, in fact, obsequiousness itself, and seemed to be particularly desirous of gaining the good-will of the *Bertha's* officers. He understood pigeon-English better

than Jim, and spoke it even better than Charlie had done. He acted the part of interpreter between Wilbur and the hands; even turned to in the galley upon occasion; and of his own accord offered to give the vessel a coat of paint above the water-line. Moran turned back to her log, and Hoang went forward. Standing on the forward deck, he looked after the *Bertha's* coolies until they disappeared behind a row of pine-trees on the Presidio Reservation, going cityward. Wilbur was nowhere in sight. For a long time Hoang studied the Lifeboat Station narrowly, while he made a great show of coiling a length of rope. The station was just out of hailing distance. Nobody seemed stirring. The whole shore and back land thereabouts was deserted; the edge of the city was four miles distant. Hoang returned to the fo'c'sle-hatch and went below, groping under his bunk in his ditty-box.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Moran a moment later, as the beach comber entered the cabin and shut the door behind him.

Hoang did not answer; but she did not need to repeat the question. In an instant Moran knew very well what he had come for.

"God!" she exclaimed under her breath, springing to her feet. "Why didn't we think of this!"

Hoang slipped his knife from the sleeve of his blouse. For an instant the old imperiousness, the old savage pride and anger, leaped again in Moran's breast—then died away forever. She was no longer the same Moran of that first fight on board the schooner, when the beach combers had plundered her of her "loot." Only a few weeks ago, and she would have fought with Hoang without hesitation and without mercy; would have wrenched a leg from the table and brained him where he stood. But she had learned since to know what it meant to be dependent; to rely for protection upon someone who

was stronger than she; to know her weakness; to know that she was at last a woman, and to be proud of it.

She did not fight; she had no thought of fighting. Instinctively she cried aloud, "Mate—mate! Oh, mate, where are you? Help me!" and Hoang's knife nailed the words within her throat.

The "loot" was in a brass-bound chest under one of the cabin's bunks, stowed in two gunny-bags. Hoang drew them out, knotted the two together, and, slinging them over his shoulder, regained the deck.

He looked carefully at the angry sky and swelling seas, noting the direction of the wind and set of the tide; then went forward and cast the anchor-chains from the windlass in such a manner that the schooner must inevitably wrench free with the first heavy strain. The dory was still tugging at the line astern. Hoang dropped the sacks in the boat, swung himself over the side, and rowed calmly toward the station's wharf. If any notion of putting to sea with the schooner had entered the obscure, perverted cunning of his mind, he had almost instantly rejected it. Chinatown was his aim; once there and under the protection of his tong, Hoang knew that he was safe. He knew the hiding-places that the See Yup Association provided for its members—hiding-places whose very existence was unknown to the police of the White Devil.

No one interrupted—no one even noticed—his passage to the station. At best, it was nothing more than a coolie carrying a couple of gunny-sacks across his shoulder. Two hours later, Hoang was lost in San Francisco's Chinatown.

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At the sight of the schooner sweeping out to sea, Wilbur was for an instant smitten rigid. What had happened? Where was Moran? Why was there nobody on

board? A swift, sharp sense of some unnamed calamity leaped suddenly at his throat. Then he was aware of a clattering of hoofs along the road that led to the fort. Hodgson threw himself from one of the horses that were used in handling the surf-boat, and ran to him hatless and panting.

"My God!" he shouted. "Look, your schooner, do you see her? She broke away after I'd started to tell you—to tell you—to tell you—your girl there on board—— It was horrible!"

"Is she all right?" cried Wilbur, at top voice, for the clamour of the gale was increasing every second.

"All right! No; they've killed her—somebody—the coolies, I think—knifed her! I went out to ask you people to come into the station to have supper with me——"

"Killed her—killed her! Who? I don't believe you——"

"Wait—to have supper with me, and I found her there on the cabin floor. She was still breathing. I carried her up on deck—there was nobody else aboard. I carried her up and laid her on the deck—and she died there. Just now I came after you to tell you, and——"

"Good God Almighty, man! who killed her? Where is she? Oh—but of course it isn't true! How did you know? Moran killed! Moran killed!"

"And the schooner broke away after I started!"

"Moran killed! But—but—she's not dead yet; we'll have to see——"

"She died on the deck; I brought her up and laid her on——"

"How do you know she's dead? Where is she? Come on, we'll go right back to her—to the station!"

"She's on board—out there!"

"Where—where is she? My God, man, tell me where she is!"

"Out there aboard the schooner. I brought her up on deck—I left her on the schooner—on the deck—she was stabbed in the throat—and then came after you to tell you. Then the schooner broke away while I was coming; she's drifting out to sea now!"

"Where is she? Where is she?"

"Who—the girl—the schooner—which one? The girl is on the schooner—and the schooner—that's her, right there—she's drifting out to sea!"

Wilbur put both hands to his temples, closing his eyes.

"I'll go back!" exclaimed Hodgson. "We'll have the surf-boat out and get after her; we'll bring the body back!"

"No, no!" cried Wilbur, "it's better—this way. Leave her, let her go—she's going out to sea—out to sea again!"

"But the schooner won't live two hours outside in this weather; she'll go down!"

"It's better—that way—let her go. I want it so!"

"I can't stay! I can't stay here!" said the other. "There's a storm coming up, and I've got to be at my station."

Wilbur did not answer; he was watching the schooner.

"I can't stay!" cried the other again. "If the patrol should signal—I can't stop here, I must be on duty. Come back, you can't do anything!"

"No!"

"I have got to go!" Hodgson ran back, swung himself on the horse, and rode away at a furious gallop, inclining his head against the gusts.

And the schooner in a world of flying spray, white scud, and driving spindrift, her cordage humming, her forefoot churning, the flag at her peak straining stiff in the gale, came up into the narrow passage of the Golden Gate, riding high upon the outgoing tide. On she

THE OCEAN IS CALLING FOR YOU

came, swinging from crest to crest of the waves that kept her company, and that ran to meet the ocean, shouting and calling out beyond there under the low, scudding clouds.

Wilbur had climbed to the top of the old fort. Erect upon its granite ledge he stood, and watched and waited.

Not once did the *Bertha Millner* falter in her race. Like an unbitted horse, all restraint shaken off, she ran free toward the ocean as to her pasture-land. She came nearer, nearer, rising and rolling with the seas, her bowsprit held due west, pointing like a finger out to sea, to the west—out to the world of romance. And then at last, as the little vessel drew opposite the old fort and passed not one hundred yards away, Wilbur, watching from the rampart, saw Moran lying upon the deck with outstretched arms and calm, upturned face; lying upon the deck of the lonely fleeing schooner as upon a bed of honour, still and calm, her great braids smooth upon her breast, her arms wide; alone with the sea: alone in death as she had been in life. She passed out of his life as she had come into it—alone, upon a derelict ship, abandoned to the sea. She went out with the tide, out with the storm; out, out, out to the great gray Pacific that knew her and loved her, and that shouted and called for her, and thundered in the joy of her as she came to meet him like a bride to meet a bridegroom.

“Good-bye, Moran!” shouted Wilbur as she passed. “Good-bye, good-bye, Moran! You weré not for me—not for me! The ocean is calling for you, dear; don’t you hear him? Don’t you hear him? Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!”

The schooner swept by, shot like an arrow through the swirling currents of the Golden Gate, and dipped and bowed and courtesied to the Pacific that reached toward her his myriad curling fingers. They enfolded

her, held her close, and drew her swiftly, swiftly out to the great heaving bosom, tumultuous and beating in its mighty joy, its savage exultation of possession.

Wilbur stood watching. The little schooner lessened in the distance—became a shadow in mist and flying spray—a shadow moving upon the face of the great waste of water. Fainter and fainter she grew, vanished, reappeared, was heaved up again—a mere speck upon the western sky—a speck that dwindled and dwindled, then slowly melted away into the gray of the horizon.

THE END

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